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OF
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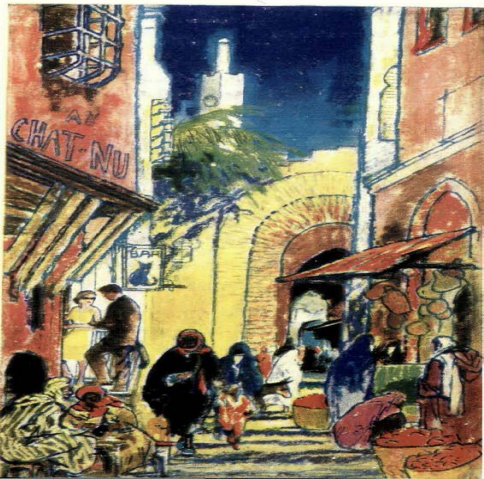
HANDLER

ANGIER
AFFAIR
BY
ARRELL
BATES

PLUS 10
STAR
TORIES



argosy

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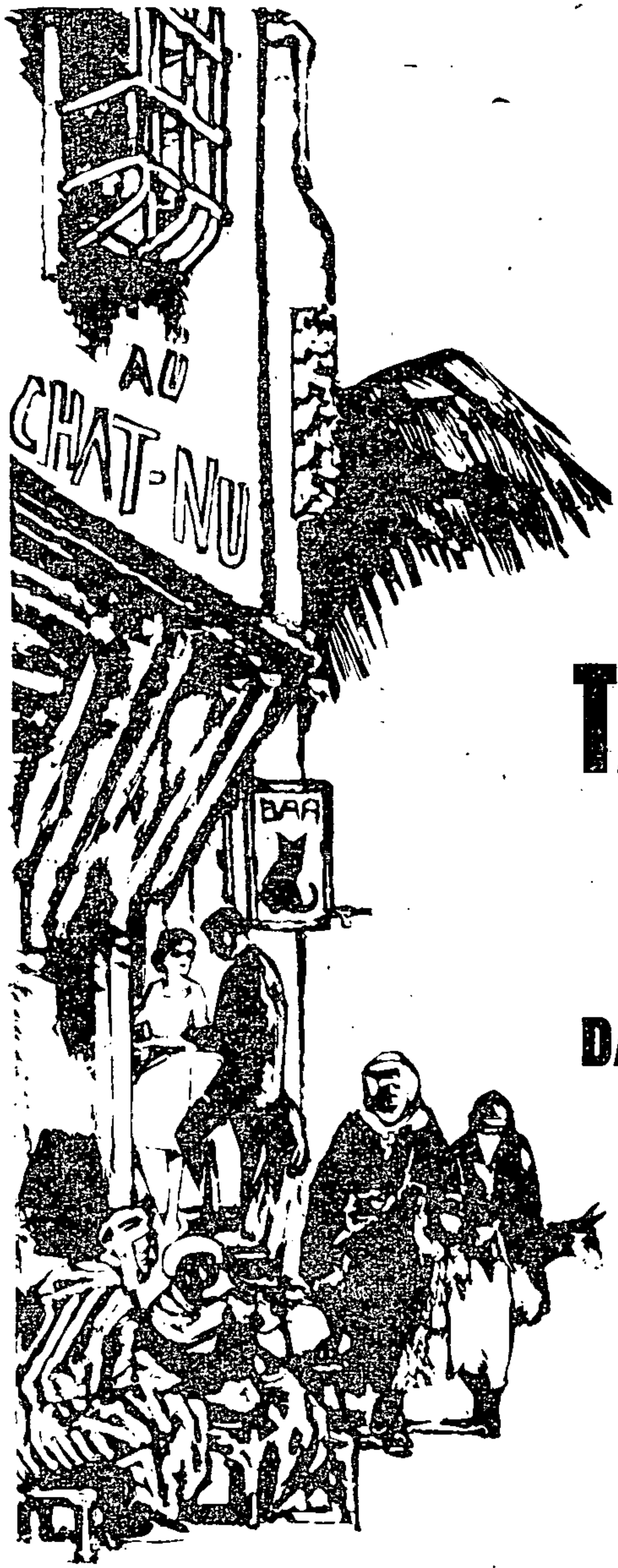

TANGIER AFFAIR

by

DARRELL BATES

She was watching me . . . changing her tactics in case I'd brought the police

IT depends, of course," Miss Alljones said, "on what you mean by sin."

She poured me another cup of tea. I took a sip of the muddy-coloured stuff, out of politeness, and then leaned back in my chair and lit a cigarette. I've never liked tea, not even on its own home ground of wet Sunday afternoons and drab suburban streets in England. I felt even less like it on a clear sunny morning in Tangier.

"Yes," I said, "I suppose it does."

Perhaps it had been a mistake, I thought to myself, to have got involved so soon with such a controversial subject. And yet all I had done, after I had asked if she liked being in Tangier, was to inquire if she didn't sometimes find it strange, after so many years in the quiet English countryside, to be living in a place with such a reputation for sin.

I had known Miss Alljones, on and off, as they say, for over twenty years. My firm had dealt with her family's affairs since long before I was born, but as it happened her father had died at the same time, on the same day almost, as I, a boy then fresh from school in Ireland, had joined Carstairs, Crump and Donnington.

My first job in the office, I remembered, had been to take Miss Alljones a cup of tea. She had come up to London the day after the funeral to talk about her father's will, and the codicils, and the various pieces of property which he had owned or leased.

"Here, you!" someone had said. "Take this tray into Mr. Carstairs' room. And don't spill the bloody tea."

I was sixteen, and green, and very unsure of myself. I had never been into Mr. Carstairs' office before—it was as if I were going into some holy place, or a famous actress' dressing room, my stomach went cold with apprehension and with awe. My hand shook when I handed her the tea and the spoon fell on the floor.

"Don't bother," she said, "I never stir my tea anyway. I like keeping the sugary bit until the end."

She had smiled to underline her words and to offset Mr.

Carstairs' scowl. I fell in love with her there and then, and I have loved her, I suppose, ever since.

She was about thirty-five then, with a placid gentle face and beautiful hands. She must be nearly sixty now I imagine, but her face is still gentle and placid, and her hands are still beautiful.

We were sitting in a café at a table by the window. Outside in the street the world, the strange cosmopolitan world of Tangier, went by, or stared or slept. It was early July and the place was full of trippers, intermingled with pale-faced Berbers and the dark skins of boys and girls, and aged crones, whose ancestors had been slaves and concubines from the east beyond the Atlas, and the south. Among the trippers we saw were a fat blowzy woman in leopard-spotted tights and a thin anxious-faced man with pale knobbly knees in yellow shorts. They were both English, I guessed, from the cruise ship in the Bay. I am an Irishman myself—the English are foreigners to me.

"Now that," Miss Alljones said, "is what I mean by sin."

I smiled. "Perhaps they're married."

"It doesn't matter," she said, "if they are. It's ugly and obscene, and what's ugly and obscene is sin." She took another sip of tea.

"Yes," I said, "I see what you mean."

We didn't say anything after that for some time. Miss Alljones watched the street beyond the window, and I watched her. When a young couple passed with hands and arms intertwined in some newly discovered and probably illicit love, or an elderly pair at ease with one another and at peace, she smiled to herself at the sweetness and the virtue of it. If the passers-by were obviously bored with one another and mutually complaining, as many of them were, or if they nagged at their restless children or swore when they bumped into a ragged, dark-skinned absentminded beggar boy, Miss Alljones' mouth moved into a bleak, disapproving line.

"I suppose," she said, suddenly turning from the window and facing me, "I ought to tell you why I asked you to come here?"

I smiled. It was nice here in the Tangier sun. I wasn't in any hurry, so long as my expenses were paid. And they always were. Miss Alljones had her singularities but she was never mean. "Why are you smiling?" she asked.

"Because, Miss Alljones," I said, "I know from experience that when you are ready to tell me you will, and that there

is nothing I can do to make you tell me earlier, or—" I lit another cigarette—" or later."

"I'm glad you came, George," she said.

It was odd really that she had sent for me. I'm not a solicitor, or anything like that. They only took me into the firm out of kindness, because I was a poor relation. I was just an office boy. Even now, after twenty years, that's more or less what I still am. Except that I don't spend much time in the office. It's more convenient for the firm sometimes, than going to the police and it's cheaper, I suppose, than hiring a private detective.

Anyway it suits me. I get about a lot. The only thing is that I know that if ever I got married, or wanted to settle down or anything, I'd be out of the job in five minutes. It's always, "You'd better catch the night train to Edinburgh," or "We want you to fly to Paris this afternoon," and no wife of course would stand for that.

There was, I suspect, another reason. Doing the work I did, I got to know a lot of things about the firm's clients and about the firm too for that matter. They wouldn't want me to share any of that information with anyone like a wife, or a regular girl. So I kept myself to myself, more or less.

It was a lonely sort of life in some ways, but it had its moments and its consolations. Miss Alljones was one of them. She had always been very kind to me ever since that first day when I had dropped the teaspoon in Mr. Carstairs' room.

She said now, "I'd better start at the beginning, hadn't I?"

"Yes," I said.

"As you know," she went on after a longish pause, "I've got a nephew, Robert Alljones. My brother's son. He's at the university, though God knows how he ever got there."

I had never met the boy, though I knew of course of his existence. Miss Alljones' brother didn't deal with the firm I worked for. He had been a judge in India, or something like that, and he was now a Justice of the Peace and a pillar of the local Conservative Association and the Golf Club and the RSPCA and the Parish Council, and all that sort of thing somewhere in the country. He was, Miss Alljones told me once, everything a man should be, and of no interest to her at all. The son, Robert, I gathered, was different.

"Well," she said again, "we had arranged that at the end of the term or whatever they call it, Robert would come out and stay with me. I had gathered that he didn't want to go home and that his parents . . . (his mother," she added in almost

audible brackets, "is just like my brother, only worse, as women of that sort are apt to be) . . . didn't particularly want him there either." Miss Alljones probed inside her handbag and drew out a thin box of cheap cheroots. She looked round at the other people in the café to make sure there was no-one she knew, and then accepted the flame of my lighter.

"There had been some trouble, I gather, about a girl, a barmaid, or the vicar's daughter, I'm not sure which."

"Perhaps both," I said, to keep the conversation going.

"I hope so," she said, "but I doubt it, with an anæmic ancestry like his."

"Anyway," she went on, "he was booked to come out on a plane on Friday, last Friday. The plane was due here at eight o'clock. I took a taxi out to the airport. I watched the people coming down the steps of the airplane one by one. Each time a man's feet appeared in the opening I thought it was him. But it wasn't. It was someone else.

"I took the same taxi home afterwards. And in the taxi, I cried. I had been looking forward to his visit more perhaps than I had realised. He would neglect me, I knew, and drink too much, and be late for meals as he was the time before, but . . ."

"The time before?"

"Yes. He invited himself out at Christmas. I was a bit surprised. Boys of his age don't usually want to spend their holidays with aunts . . . But he came, and I enjoyed his visit. He's wild and a rascal, but . . . well, it made a nice change."

"Perhaps he missed the plane," I said. Five days had gone by then, I knew, but I wanted to say something to ease her mind. "It's not easy to get another booking at short notice on this route."

"You did," she said.

I didn't say anything. I waited until she was ready to go on with her story.

"Yes," she said. "I too thought at first that perhaps he had missed the plane. Until I got the telegram."

"What did it say?"

She took a piece of paper out of her bag and handed it to me. The telegram said:

SORRY. LUGGAGE STOLEN. WRITING. ROBERT.

I handed the piece of paper back to her.

"Don't you think," I said, "it's time we had a drink?" It was half-past twelve.

We walked down a slope of road towards the sea. A small boy with ears and eyes and mouth and nose of pale, delicately petalled flesh, and a bare scrofulous head importuned me with shoe polish and a box of brushes. I told him to go to hell and he used in reply some French and English words that one doesn't usually hear from boys of eight or nine. Miss Alljones gave him a crumpled note and a coin or two. The boy gave her a smile of angelic gentleness, put his tongue out at me and disappeared.

"Let's go in here," I said. We sat at a bar, and drank rum and Coca Cola laced with ice and pieces of mint.

"Have you heard from him yet?"

"No," she said. "I haven't heard a word."

"What about his parents? Do they know where he is?"

"No. I sent them a telegram. They don't know where he is, nor," she added, "do they seem to care. They just said, 'Don't worry, he'll turn up.'"

"Oh," I said. I finished off my drink. I wondered again why she had sent for me. If it were just a question of finding him, she would have sent us a letter in London explaining what had happened. Miss Alljones wasn't poor, but she wasn't one to waste her money asking me to come all the way to Tangier just to tell me her nephew had missed his plane and would I go back to London and see what he was up to, and where.

"No," she said, guessing, as she was apt to do, what was in my mind, "there's more to it than that."

She looked round at the other people in the bar. There was a melancholy-looking Tangerine, with thick glasses and a fez, who appeared to be calculating out the profit of something, or the loss. There were several internationally assorted couples filling in the time before lunch with beer or lemonade or lechery or gin, and a pale-faced man with anxious eyes who kept glancing at his watch. I didn't like the look of him—he was too carefully dressed and his finger-nails were too polished and too clean. "You see," she went on "I've had a telephone call."

"But you said you hadn't . . ."

"It wasn't from him. It was from someone else."

"From London?"

"No. It was a local call, from here in Tangier."

Several newcomers had come into the bar since we had arrived, and there were more people now sitting on either side of us.

"I think," said Miss Alljones, "that it's time we went to my house for lunch."

I persuaded her to walk a little way before we hailed a taxi. I had a good look round; as far as I could see, no-one was following us.

"Here we are," she said.

I had imagined that she lived in a small tidy house somewhere in the hilly suburbs of Tangier, set in a small tidy garden overlooking the sea. But the taxi had stopped in a narrow cobbled lane in the Moorish part of the town. A camel had passed recently, and there were other smells and residues as well, and a small boy asleep against the wall. On the other side, set in the peeling whitewashed wall, was a door of rough unpainted wood. On this Miss Alljones rapped now with the handle of her parasol.

"It's better," she explained, while we waited for the door to open, "to leave them unpainted. It attracts less attention from passers-by and tourists, and the tax man."

The door was opened by a small dark silent man in a long white shift that reached to below his knees and was bound at the waist by a scarlet sash. He opened the door, inspected us carefully and then shut it again behind us without a smile or a salute or a word.

"His name is Ahmed," she said. "He and his wives look after me."

The door opened on to a small courtyard, with a fountain and a covering of vines, where it was cool and orderly and quiet. Miss Alljones led me through the courtyard into a room that looked out over the huddled flat-topped roofs of the town as they sloped away towards the sea. Across the Straits the Spanish hills were bare and brown and arid after the summer's dryness and the heat, and in the distance to the east the mass of Gibraltar was marked in an unlovely plume of grey unwashed cloud, like a piece of London fog, I thought, that the English had put there as a badge of ownership.

It was some time before she said anything more about the telephone call.

"Yes," she said, when one of Ahmed's wives had cleared the table and brought the coffee, "the telephone call was from someone else.

"It was on Tuesday," she said, "that is four days after Robert should have arrived. Yesterday in fact." She went on then to describe the telephone call for me.

"'Is that Miss Alljones?' a voice asked. 'Yes,' I said.

"'I have something belonging to a friend of yours. Robert, your nephew, perhaps. Is he there?'

"'Who is speaking, please?' I said.

"There was no reply. I thought they had rung off, but when I said, 'Hello,' the same voice answered.

"'Is he there?' it said again.

"After a pause I said, no, he wasn't.

"'Never mind,' the voice went on, 'I think you yourself perhaps might be interested in what I've got. It's a suitcase, a leather suitcase.'

"'I see,' I said.

"'Would you like it, Miss Alljones? Would you like me to send it to you?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'of course.'

"'Well, you can have it. For,' the voice added, 'ten thousand American dollars.'

"'Are you trying to blackmail me?'

"'*Yes.*'

"The irritating part of it, George," Miss Alljones said, "was that I liked that. I liked that direct—*Yes*—in answer to my question, and I liked too the sound and the temper of the voice. 'But don't be ridiculous,' I said, 'it's just a suitcase and a lot of smelly old clothes and things.'

"'How do you know?' I didn't say anything to that. Perhaps, I thought, I had said too much already.

"'But I do, you see,' the voice went on, 'and you don't. That makes a difference, doesn't it? Some of the things in the suitcase are really quite interesting . . .'

"I didn't know," Miss Alljones explained to me as we sat there drinking coffee, "what to do. From what I knew of Robert there might indeed be something in the suitcase which if exposed could do him or his parents harm. He is, as I said, rather a wild, incalculable boy. In the end I asked if there was a number I could ring, or an address . . ."

"'What do you take me for?' the voice said, 'I'll ring you again tomorrow at the same time. By then I hope for your nephew's sake that you will have made up your mind to pay. Otherwise I fear he's going to find himself in jail.'

"'Meanwhile,' the voice went on, 'just to convince you that I've really got the suitcase, and that I'm not bluffing I'll send you something.'"

Later that evening the doorbell had rung. In the postbox there was a bulky envelope. Inside it, was a typewritten

copy of a letter which Miss Alljones herself had sent to Robert a week or two before and a pair of socks, well worn and not very clean, with Robert's name on them.

"It was then," she said, "that I sent a telegram to you."

I had got the telegram at eleven o'clock that night. I had caught a plane at three in the morning, and arrived in time to have a late breakfast in Tangier.

"When is he due to ring you up again?" I asked.

She stared at me. "When is who due to ring me up?"

"The voice," I said. "The man who rang you up before."

"Oh, I see what you mean. At six o'clock. But," she added, "it wasn't a man. It was a woman."

I looked at my watch. It was nearly four. Another two hours until the next telephone call.

"I think," Miss Alljones said, "I will go and take a nap." As she passed me she paused. "I'm glad you came." I watched her go out of the door and up the stairs. Then I went to the telephone and started to dial.

It took half an hour for my call to London to come through. Miss Morrison answered it. Although she had been with the firm for thirty years or more we still called her Miss Morrison. I didn't even know her other name. No-one took any kind of liberties with her, either of the body or of the mind, and she was worth her weight in gold.

"Hello there," I said, "what's it like in London?"

"It's raining," she said. Miss Morrison was a laconic woman. She never wasted time on words. She came from the north of Scotland. I didn't pursue the subject of the weather. I knew that if I told her the sun was out in Tangier she would only disapprove. Sunshine and foreign parts were sinful as far as Miss Morrison was concerned.

"I want you to do one or two things for me."

"Yes," she said. Why else, her voice implied, would you ring me up, you stupid Irishman, with the telephone charges running at the rate of nine shillings a minute. She listened very carefully all the same while I told her exactly what I wanted her to do.

I went out into the garden and looked at the sea. Then I went back into the house and opened the window and leaned on the sill and looked at the flat, busy roofs of old Tangier and listened to the murmur of its sounds, and smelled the acrid elemental texture of its smells, and waited for the telephone to ring at six o'clock. Miss Alljones had finished her nap, and we agreed that she would take the call.

It wasn't until nearly half-past six that the telephone rang. She picked up the telephone. "Yes?"

I could hear the voice at the other end too. It was a quiet voice for a woman but it had substance and sureness, and it came through very clearly in the room, shuttered now against the angle of the evening sun. "It's me," it said.

I put out my hand and took the telephone.

"Hello," I said, "you nasty blackmailing bitch."

There was no reply. There was no sound at all for a long time. Not even a catch of surprise, or of unease or any breath quickening in anger or amusement or fear. When at last the reply came it was in the same quiet tone.

"I like your voice," it said. "Who are you?"

I blew the smoke from my cigarette into the mouthpiece, and hoped that at the other end it would give the right effect.

"Are you Robert?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"I didn't think so. You don't sound like him. He's rather callow isn't he, and you are . . . not."

"I think," I said, "that we had better meet."

There was another long pause. "All right," she said.

I looked at my watch again. Miss Morrison wouldn't be late with her call but for all I knew the man at the Tangier telephone exchange might be asleep.

"At ten o'clock," I said. I gave her the name of a place I knew. It was small, and dirty, and not very nice.

"I can't go there," she said, "I'm a respectable girl."

"It's good enough for a girl like you. I'll be wearing a beret and a beard."

"All right," she said in the end. "I'll be there at ten o'clock." There was a pause, but I knew she was still there. "You won't bring the police, will you?"

"No," I said.

"No," she said. "I don't somehow think you will. If you do I won't be the only one to go to jail. Goodbye."

Miss Alljones went to the sideboard and poured out some drinks.

"Good luck," she said, and drank most of hers in one. "You liked the sound of her, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"So did I. But," she added, "I wish I didn't."

"So," I said, "do I."

When the telephone rang again, at half-past eight, it was

to say among other things that Robert had not reported the loss of a suitcase on that Friday, or on any other day. Nor did anyone know where Robert was. He had disappeared.

It was nearly an hour before she came. Perhaps, I thought, she had been watching me from a distance and working out a change of tactics when she saw my looks, or waiting to see if I had brought the police, or perhaps it was just that, in addition to being a blackmailer, she was the sort of woman who is always late. I didn't mind. I knew she would come in the end. Meanwhile the *Bar au Chat Nu* had a certain interest.

There was an outer bar which was noisy and full of the smoke and the fumes and the bad language of almost every nationality, it seemed, on earth. There was an opening at the far end covered with a curtain of beads. Beyond it, in an L-shaped room, were rows of cubicles of rough unpainted board, and a small space for dancing, and a one-man band. He was a very dark and sad-faced negro, with a clarinet.

"The singer," a waiter told me, "she come at twelve o'clock."

He described her shape and quality in one expressive movement of his hand.

I had just started on my third drink when I felt a touch on my shoulder. I didn't look round. Several people had approached me in the course of the last hour, women of various sorts, and even men, and some whose exact sex I couldn't fathom. It was, it seemed, a very sociable bar.

"A beret and a beard. Is it you?"

"Yes," I said. I got up. "Let's go inside."

I had thought she would be sophisticated and brittle and goodlooking in a hard sort of way, with lots of dark lipstick and carmine nails.

She asked for a beer. She wasn't, I saw as I watched her across the table, any of these things.

"Well . . ." she said. She had pale, unpainted, rather outward-turning lips—as if she had spent a lot of her childhood reading Hans Andersen's fairy tales. They gave her an air of open-mouthed, rather startled innocence. "Have you brought the money?"

"No," I said.

"No," she said. Her face was dominated by her eyes. They were very large and wide and pale brown, like a gazelle I had seen once in the zoo. "I didn't think you would."

"How did you get the suitcase?" There seemed no reason, now that I had seen her, to beat about the bush.

She stared at me with her large wide eyes for some time before she answered. She hadn't, I saw, taken any trouble with her face, or her hair, or her clothes. She looked—apart from the eyes—like a Siamese cat, once cherished, that had got lost and been out in the rain.

"I stole it."

I waited for her to go on. Now that she had decided to tell the truth about this part of the story at any rate, I thought I might as well let her have her head. Few women, even if they are thieves and blackmailers, can resist the opportunity to talk.

"I was in a station hotel lounge in London having a cup of tea. A man came in, with a suitcase. A young man. A rather spoilt young man I thought."

"Robert," I said.

"Yes, Robert. He didn't put his suitcase in the usual place, in the luggage rack. He kept it with him. There was something a bit furtive, I thought, about his looks and about his actions. It interested me..." She paused. "In the end he hid the suitcase behind a hat stand near his table. You know the sort..."

"Yes," I said. "I know."

"He sat down. At the next table was a girl, a flashy sort of girl. She tried to pick him up, and it didn't take her long. He looked the sort of young man who is both pleased with himself and callow at the same time. Any girl," she added, "can pick up a man like that."

"He got up after a bit and moved to her table. Soon they were fully occupied with one another. I got up, picked up the suitcase and walked out."

She looked at me for a moment with her large wide eyes. "I wanted to see what was inside it, you see. I wanted to see what had made him furtive."

"Just out of curiosity?"

"Yes, and greed of course."

She was about thirty, I guessed. I wondered how long she had been stealing, and whether she had ever been caught. I thought she had been, once at any rate. That perhaps was why she wanted the money in American dollars, to get away from England and the prison tag around her neck.

"What made you bring it all the way to Tangier?"

"You're asking a lot of questions—isn't it my turn?"

"All right. Your turn."

Again she looked at me for some time before she spoke.

"Who are you? And what brought you," she imitated my voice, "all the way to Tangier?"

"I've known Miss Alljones," I said, "for a long time. Since I was a sort of dead-end thing like you. I don't like to see her squeezed or hurt."

"So?" Her voice was still quiet and sure.

"So . . . I'm trying to tell her what to do. Whether to pay you something, or whether," I added, "to throw your dirty blackmail back into your—" I hesitated; I still didn't know whether insults or compliments were the better tactics—"into your face."

"And what have you decided, Mr. . . .?"

"I don't know yet. I've still a lot of questions to ask you."

"In that case," she said, "could I have another drink?"

"Why," I asked again when the drinks had come, "why did you come to Tangier?"

"I had to. There was nothing in the suitcase, inside or outside to show who Robert was or where he lived. All I found was the letter from Miss Alljones with her address stamped on the writing paper. There wasn't an envelope. So . . ."

"Yes," I said, "I see. And I can see that you wouldn't want to write to her from London."

"No. One can't be too careful with blackmail, can one? Some people are so . . ."

"Who paid your fare?" I asked.

"I did. With my own money. It took nearly all I had."

"You must have been very sure then," I said, "of getting your money back."

"Yes, I was. I still am. Quite sure." She took another sip of her beer. "My name is Mary, by the way." She smiled. She looked very much at ease. I didn't smile. I still had a long way to go, it seemed.

At twelve o'clock the singer appeared. No-one took any notice of her. Until she started to sing.

Her first song was *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*, in Greek. The next one was *La Vie en Rose*, in French. No-one clapped but everyone was very quiet. She had a deep, sad voice. It was very moving. It was some time before I realised that she was blind.

I returned to my drink and lit another cigarette. All I knew so far was how the girl had got the suitcase, and why

she had brought it to Tangier. I still didn't know why Robert hadn't reported the loss of the suitcase, or why he was lying low. The only other thing I knew, from my telephone call to London, was that the last time Robert Alljones had visited his aunt in Tangier he had, when he returned to England, bought a fast and expensive motor car.

"Don't women interest you?"

I looked up and saw that she was watching me. She pointed at the singer. The blind girl was singing a slow song now, in Arabic, and she was taking off her clothes, one by one.

"I like concentrating," I said, "on one thing at a time."

"Aren't you going to ask me," she said when the blind girl had gone, "aren't you going to ask me what's in the suitcase?"

"No. Why should I? I like it here. I'm not in any hurry. You're the one that's in a hurry."

"I like it here too," she said. But I knew she would tell me soon. She hadn't any money for one thing, she hadn't even got the money to buy her own cigarettes. Each time I lit one I could see her need for one in her face and in the way her fingers moved.

In the end she reached into her bag and brought out a piece of paper. This, I saw when she handed it to me, was typewritten and obviously a copy. Mary was a careful girl.

It didn't say very much. *Collect*, it said, *from George at the Café Goille and deliver to the same places as before.* The note wasn't addressed to anyone, nor was it signed.

"So Robert was going to smuggle something," I said, "and he had done it before. It's very interesting, but it isn't worth ten thousand dollars."

"Unless," the girl added, "you happen to know what that something was."

She drew another piece of paper out of her bag and held it up for me to see. On it was typed a list of names and addresses in London and in Birmingham and opposite each were figures, some in ounces and some in pounds.

She took a box of matches from her bag and put a match to the paper. When it started to burn her fingers, she let the blackened paper fall and drift on to the table top.

"It's only a copy, but one wouldn't want to leave a thing like that around, would one?"

I didn't say anything, but I reached into my pocket for my cigarettes and lit two together and gave her one.

"Would one?" she said again.

"No," I said. "One wouldn't."

"If someone sent the suitcase to the police," she went on, moving in now like a prowling cat towards a feeding sparrow, "and they did a little checking on the various people concerned in Tangier and in London and in Birmingham they might find out what it was exactly that Robert was going to carry, and what it was that he had carried before." She blew two delicate streams of smoke across the table into my face. Her nostrils, that I had begun to think were so small and delicate, began to look more like the barrels of a shotgun. "I guess that he would get about three years."

Or five perhaps, I thought. Trafficking in dangerous drugs, like marihuana or kief, wasn't popular with British magistrates. "It might just be tobacco," I said. "People will do a lot in England nowadays for a cheaper smoke."

She smiled. It wasn't a particularly mirthful smile. "There's another thing, Mr. Clever Dick. The suitcase had a hollow bottom, and in it were traces of the 'something' that Robert had carried in it before. He seems," she added, "to have been, one way and another, a rather careless boy."

I didn't say anything. The man with the clarinet got up and walked to the middle of the floor. The lights went out. There was a man's laugh, and whispers, and a small scream. A spotlight came on and wandered over the room picking out the blue early-morning jowls and the glasses on the table tops and the heads of smooth fair hair, and dark. At last the spotlight settled on the man with the clarinet. His face in the circle of light looked grey and ill and old.

I don't know what it was he played. I had a lot of thinking to do. I didn't hear the clarinet and it was some time before I heard the voice of the singer. She sang out of the darkness and I couldn't see her. It wasn't until the spotlight touched her face, shining harshly into the blind eyes, that I realised it was the same singer as before.

"Well," the girl said, "do I get my ten thousand dollars?"

The singer had gone now, and the man with the clarinet. Most of the people had left too. The only things in the room were sawdust and empty bottles and the stale smells of sweat and smoke.

"I'll have to talk to Miss Alljones." I put on a neutral expression but it didn't do much to dim the quick bright gleam of victory in Mary's eyes.

"All right. But if I don't get the money tomorrow... I'm in a hurry."

"I know you are." I took out my wallet and put some notes on the table.

"Is this on account?"

"No. It's not on account. It's a . . . let's call it a personal loan. When did you last have a good square meal?"

She didn't say anything. A spot of colour came into her cheekbones and went away again. She picked up the notes and put them in her bag and smiled at me for a quick, brief moment with her eyes. I got up. It was time for us to go.

Out in the street it was quiet and cool and empty. "The suitcase isn't in your room, is it?" I asked.

"No. I'm not such a fool as that."

"No. I didn't think you were. In that case you won't mind if I walk you back to your hotel, will you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. Her hotel was along the waterfront. It was a small and very cheap hotel.

"Goodbye," I said. She told me she would phone Miss Alljones' house at twelve o'clock. We stood there on the pavement outside the door of the hotel, looking at one another. Now that I knew what I had to do I wished I had never come to Tangier.

"Listen," I said. I put my hand on her arm. "If you want me . . ." I wrote the name of my hotel and the number of my room on a card and gave it to her. Then I turned on my heel and walked away.

On the other side of the road I looked back. She was still standing there in the doorway of the hotel, looking at the card in her hand.

I turned left at the corner and started to walk up the hill. At the top I turned right, and then right again. I looked at my watch. It was half-past one. It would be a quarter to two I thought by the time I got to the Café Goille.

"It's me." Her voice at the other end of the telephone sounded very small. The time, I saw when I had ungummed my eyes from sleep, was half-past five.

"Yes," I said.

"I . . ." The voice faltered and then went on. "Some men came and searched my room, and . . ."

I yawned. But not from sleepiness. I always yawn when I feel that I'm going to be sick. "Did they find anything?"

"No. There wasn't anything to find. Except me . . ." Again her voice faltered. "They've given me until ten o'clock to give them the suitcase."

"I'll come for you," I said. "I shan't be long." There was no answer. "Isn't that what you want?"

Again there was no answer, for a moment or two. Then she said, "Yes, that's what I want." There was a click and the line went dead.

The night porter at my hotel knew of a man who had a taxi. It didn't cost me very much. But the night porter at the cheap hotel on the waterfront was more expensive. I wondered how much the men had paid him for the number of her room and for a passkey. It was some time before he would let me through and before he told me the number of her room. When he pocketed my notes the lines of his pock-marked face creased into a smile of sorts.

The reason for the smile was sitting with his legs across the top of the stairs.

"What you want?" he asked.

"I live here," I said. "Room eleven." He didn't bother to move his legs. As I stepped over him I hit down backhanded at his head with a thing I carry to swat flies, and other pests, in places like Tangier. He rolled over with a small bleak grunt. I put the thing back in my pocket and walked down the corridor to the room marked 3 . . .

I had left the taxi a hundred yards down the road. When we were both inside, I told the man to drive like hell to nowhere in particular. The girl sat in the other corner. Her face wasn't so pretty as it had been when I last saw it. I could still see the marks of the palms that had slapped her, and the fists, and the fingers that had squeezed her throat. I lit her a cigarette.

"Where is the suitcase?" I said.

She stared at me but she didn't say anything.

I leaned forward and tapped the window and told the man to stop.

"Listen, Mary. You've got two choices. Either you tell me where the suitcase is or you get out and walk. It won't take them long to find you in a place like Tangier. You can do whichever you like, it's all the same to me."

It didn't take her long to make up her mind. She wasn't a slow girl and it helps, of course, to make up one's mind when there isn't really any choice.

"It's at the railway station. In the left-luggage office."

The left-luggage office didn't open until six o'clock. We sat in the refreshment room at the station and drank coffee. I hadn't had coffee that tasted so good in years. But it wasn't

so good, I imagined, for the girl. It must have stung the raw edges and tears and splits in her mouth and her cheek.

At six o'clock I collected the suitcase. When I had opened it and seen what I wanted I shut it again.

"Can I go now?" She certainly had courage, there were no tears and no complaints.

"No," I said. "Unless you want to get a knife in your back. So long as they think you still have the suitcase it's not safe for you to move."

"I know. But why should you care? Now that you've got the suitcase I'm no more use to you."

I took the suitcase in one hand, and her hand in the other and went out to find a taxi.

"Well," Miss Alljones said, "I expect you'd like some breakfast."

She had come down in her dressing-gown to find us waiting there. She looked at me and at the suitcase and at the girl. I still held the girl's hand, and I felt the tenseness and the fear go out of it as soon as Miss Alljones came into the room. She disengaged her hand from mine and went slowly across the room.

"I expect," I said, "that she'd like some." Suddenly I felt unnecessary and in the way—a man in the presence of two women who had things to talk about. "But I've got something else to do." I opened the suitcase and tipped Robert's socks and shirts and shoes on to the floor. On top of them I put Miss Alljones' letter. All that was left in the suitcase now was the false bottom and the list of addresses in London and in Birmingham, and the note about the Café Goille. I shut the suitcase and picked it up and went out of the room.

At half-past two we had lunch on the terrace. Miss Alljones looked pleased with herself, she kept smiling softly and looking at the girl. Someone had bathed the bruises and cuts on her face, and someone had bought her a light blue linen shirt and a dark blue linen skirt. She looked very fresh and cool and untouched. She looked like someone's cherished niece.

"Mary's going to stay with me for a few days," Miss Alljones said. "I think she needs a rest. Particularly," she added, raising her eyes and looking at me, "after the way she's been treated recently."

"Yes," I said as dryly as I could, "I expect she does." I didn't look at the girl. I wondered how much of the story she had told and how much of the story she really knew.

"What have you done with the suitcase?" Miss Alljones asked. "Did you burn it or drop it in the sea?"

I smiled, but I didn't say anything.

The girl moved in her chair and looked at me and looked away again. "There are some things," she said, "that I don't understand."

"Yes, there are some things that I don't understand." Miss Alljones gave me a look that made me feel like a cockroach on someone's spotless, whitewashed wall.

"Well," I said, "perhaps it will help you to see things right if I remind you that the only, repeat only, thing I was interested in was to get the suitcase as quickly and as cheaply as possible. If someone got hurt or stung in the process that was no concern of mine, provided it wasn't Miss Alljones or her precious nephew." I was nettled by this cosy feminine alliance. Perhaps I was jealous of it, too.

All I got from this outburst was a long silence and a pair of Giaconda smiles. I poured myself another glass of wine and drank it in a single swallow.

"Why then," Miss Alljones said at last, "did you give Mary the number of your room when you left her at her hotel last night? And why when she called you did you go to her at once like a—" she gave me a sideways look, "—like some sort of knight errant on a horse?"

"I went in a taxi," I said, "and I went because I wanted to get the suitcase."

"No, you didn't, George. It would have been much simpler if you had left her to stew in her own juice. Once you had told the people at the Café Goille that she had the suitcase and where she was, there wasn't any need for you to get the suitcase yourself. Either they would get it from her, or she would have been found in some dark alley strangled or with a knife in her back. And that would have been the end of the matter as far as we were concerned, wouldn't it?"

I didn't say anything. There wasn't anything to say. Except the truth, and that, perhaps, was better left unsaid.

"Wouldn't it, George?"

"Yes," I said. I got up and looked at the view. It seemed a long time ago since I had looked at that view the previous afternoon. It looked different now; it was covered in a concealing haze like the margins of a Chinese print.

"I don't like to see a man's judgment influenced by emotional considerations." Miss Alljones' voice sounded for a moment like a civil servant's but the effect was spoilt by the

laugh that followed it. "However," she added, "I'll forgive you. Mary is an unusual girl."

"Well," I said. "Now that you've had your little bit of fun I've got something else to tell you . . . I didn't drop the suitcase in the sea and I didn't burn it. I sold it. There's a very good market for second-hand suitcases in Tangier."

I looked first at Miss Alljones and then at the girl. There was surprise in their faces—there was even, I was glad to see, a touch of fear.

"Yes. I took it to the Café Goille. I reckoned that if they wanted it enough to search Mary's room at five in the morning and to beat her up and to threaten her with a knife in her back, they might want it enough to pay a price for it. And they did."

"But . . ." They both spoke at once, but as soon as they started to protest their fears they saw that there wasn't anything to fear. "Yes," Miss Alljones said, "I see. They are only concerned to protect their network. Now that they've got the suitcase and the names, they're no longer interested in Mary, or in Robert, or in anyone, except themselves . . ."

There was a nice, long satisfying silence. In the distance a dog barked, a car hooted, a legless beggar cried for alms, a child laughed. "How much did you get?" the girl asked.

I turned my head and looked at her. For a long time I had avoided her eyes.

I took out my wallet and put the bundle of notes on the table in front of her. "Count it. Morally, if that's the right word, it belongs to you."

"Yes," said Miss Alljones, "morally it belongs to you."

The girl counted the notes slowly. There were points of wetness in the corner of her eyes like early morning dew on grass.

"Ten thousand dollars." She pushed the pile of notes away from her in the direction of Miss Alljones' plate. "But I can't take them now."

Suddenly there was the sound of a match and light of a flame. Miss Alljones watched the hundred dollar bill which she held in her hand curl in the flame and blacken and then drift slowly to the floor. Then she pushed the remainder of the notes back across the table to the place where Mary sat.

"Take them, and try and start your life again. But now," Miss Alljones added, "there's only nine thousand and nine hundred dollars. A girl's got to learn somehow, hasn't she, that crime doesn't pay?"

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Groucho

by LEO ROSTEN

Devotees of Marx Brothers' antics cannot be limited to any country, age group or type of humour. They are hilariously funny to almost everyone — and the funniest of them all is Groucho. He has always been a writer's enigma — but at last we have the funny man in profile by another funny man —Leo Rosten. Author, film writer, professor and editorial adviser, Rosten is most famous for his persuasive studies of the more enduring characters in American humour. Anyway, this article certainly made us laugh —and that is all we want to say about it . . .

ONE day in California, my telephone rang and a nasty voice rasped, "This is Professor Waldemar Strumbelknauff."

"Who?" I asked.

"Let's not quibble," the voice said coldly. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, beating your children up that way? You Cossack! If you were a man you'd cŏme over here and knock my teeth out. If you were half a man, you'd knock half my teeth out. I'm sick and tired of your calling at all hours of the night to ask for specimens of my nail-clippings."

"Who *is* this?" I fumed.

"This is the Secretary of the National Committee to Free Georgia. And I suppose you'll tell me you don't even know her! A fine kettle of fish! . . . This is Groucho. How are you? As if I really care."

I should, of course, have known it from the first. No-one else could have delivered so brazen and bewildering a monologue, in so indignant a tone, with such a mixture of defiance and contempt.

My life was never the same after Groucho Marx learned my phone number. At one time or another I have been telephoned by a barnacle-scraper named Formosa Greulenheimer, by the president of the Society for Counterfeit Money, and by one Captain Raoul P. Clamhead, of the Iranian FBI. I have been awakened at ungodly hours to be chivvied about why I should have my wife simonised, my lawn paved, or my children sold. I have been identified to strangers as the brain behind the International Uranium Cartel, the man who invented the spiral notebook, and a tapioca-runner from Acapulco. My friends have been tipped off that originally I had two heads and my son has been accused of being a midget, graduated from Yale in 1908, whom I keep undersized by the injection of anti-growth gland juices. It hasn't been an easy life . . .

Being a friend of Marx's isn't something you do lightly: you have to be in perfect physical condition. During the worst days of World War II rationing, Oscar Levant flew into Los Angeles on a concert tour.

Groucho said, "Oscar, you look tired. Why don't you come to my house for dinner? I've got the most wonderful cook in town, and I've saved enough ration coupons for a steak four inches thick."

Levant cried gratefully, "What's your address?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" said Groucho, and departed.

The war, incidentally, was the occasion for one of his most celebrated ad libs. He was waiting in a general's office, prior to entertaining the troops, when the phone rang. Marx picked up the receiver and crooned, "World War Two-oo."

Earl Wilson's wife was once rash enough to make conversation with Marx by venturing, "I made a stew last night."

"Anyone I know?" asked Groucho.

He once expressed interest in joining a certain beach club in Santa Monica. A friend told him uneasily, "You don't want to apply for membership in that beach club, Groucho."

"Why not?" asked Marx.

"Well, frankly, they're anti-Semitic."

Marx, a Jew whose wife wasn't, said, "Will they let my son go into the water up to his knees?"

He possesses the singular faculty of *hearing* with originality. One night, while he was driving me to a preview, I suddenly remembered that it was my father's birthday. "Would you mind stopping at a Western Union office?" I asked. "I want to wire my father."

"What's the matter?" inquired the master. "Can't he stand by himself?"

Marx once asked a friend, "How did you like my radio show last night?"

"I only caught the first ten minutes," the friend apologised. "I was called away—"

"A fine friend you've turned out to be," Marx exclaimed indignantly. "*I* listened to the programme from start to finish. That's the kind of friend *I* am!"

When a young actress asked his advice on how to succeed in the theatre, Marx replied, "My advice to you and to all struggling actresses, is this: Keep struggling. If you keep struggling, you won't get into trouble—and if you don't get into trouble, you'll never be much of an actress."

My favourite anecdote about him involves the time he was driving back from Mexico and, like everyone re-entering the country, was stopped at the border. The immigration satrap asked him, "Are you a citizen?"

"Certainly," replied Marx.

"Birthplace?"

"New York."

"Occupation?"

"Smuggler."

He is a man who simply abhors the obvious. A dowager once violated our privacy, while I was lunching with him at the Brown Derby, to gush: "Oh, *do* pardon me—but aren't you Groucho *Marx*?"

"No," Marx murmured, "are you?"

When a tippler slapped him on the back with the gambit, "Groucho, you old son-of-a-gun, you probably don't remember me!" Marx fixed the poltroon with his wall-eyed glare and declaimed: "I never forget a face—but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception."

When a curvaceous blonde tried to flatter him by cooing, "You're a man after my heart," Marx leered, "That's not all

I'm after." And he left one dinner party with this farewell to his host: "Don't think this hasn't been a dull evening, because it has."

He is a master of verbal ambush and likes to startle the Philistines with comments such as: "I was always awkward, even as a young girl," or "I want to apologise for not returning your call. I've been so busy not returning calls that I just couldn't get around to not returning yours in time."

Some years ago the natives of Hollywood were extolling the supernatural powers of a spiritualist who was cashing in on *séances* for the gullible. This sorcerer might still be plying his occult wiles had not some friends challenged Marx, who had listened to their raptures with icy reserve, to appraise the psychic's wizardry for himself. Groucho went to a *séance*. He sat silent and baleful through a demonstration in which the spiritualist answered the most arcane questions, broke the barrier between those who are here and those who are hereafter, plumbed awesome secrets from beyond the grave, advised, warned, instructed and uplifted. After an hour of this exhausting omniscience, the seer intoned, "And now my spirit grows weary . . . Our journey into the unknown draws to a close. There is time for only one more question."

Marx asked it: "What's the capital of South Dakota?"

Performing, Groucho is unlike any other comedian in the republic. He does not tell stories. He does not tell jokes. He does not use contrived "situations." He does not follow a script.

Trying to carry on a conversation with Groucho gives you the feeling that you've fallen into an automatic washer with Betty Hutton. You get dead-panned, misunderstood, misquoted and—in the end—routed by whatever wild notion flits into that demoniacal mind. In the middle of a political discussion, he is liable to rise gravely and announce, "Gentlemen, they have fired on Fort Sumter." If you are around him during one of his free-flight moods you feel like the bird that flew too low and got caught in a badminton game.

Mr. Marx has a wall-eyed stare, the lope of an arthritic *roué*, and a real moustache. His leer, the most distinguished characteristic of an òtherwise innocent face, suggests a wolf who is alarmingly intimate with evil.

His voice—the flattest, most bored monotone in the business—resembles that of a sardonic owl. For all I know, he may be an owl.

He is a soft-spoken gentleman, dry in manner, surprisingly gentle, who moves about slowly and regards the world with conspicuous disenchantment.

I have never heard him laugh, though I have often seen him (in approval of someone else's witticism) smile faintly. Like virtually all great comic talents, he is discontented with the role in which fate has cast and so amply rewarded him. He wanted to be a doctor. He thinks a lifetime spent in making people laugh not especially laudable. He prefers reading to raillery.

He is a dangerous man to bring within deflating distance of fakery. He once asked a professional wrestler if it is true that every grunt-and-groan contest is fixed. The gladiator smiled archly, "That's just a dirty rumour!"

"Well, how many dirty rumours have you wrestled lately?" asked Marx.

When a bank sent him an effusive form letter, after he had opened an account, a letter that ended with the obligatory sentiment: "If we can ever be of any assistance, do not hesitate to call on us," Marx called on them pronto—

Gentlemen:

The best assistance you can give me is to steal some money from the account of one of your richer clients and credit it to mine.

Groucho Marx

When *Variety*, the bible of show biz, editorialised that the Marx Brothers could earn $20,000 a week if they would only work together again, Marx wrote the editor—

Dear Sir:

Apparently you are under the impression that the only thing that matters in this world is money. That is quite true.

Groucho Marx

It is little short of suicide to try banter with him. During the years that the Marx Brothers cast their lustre on the stage (*Coconuts, Animal Crackers, I'll say She Is*), Groucho's siblings often tried to throw him off-balance with loony ad libs. Once, while Groucho was in the middle of a so-called love scene with Margaret Dumont, the memorable *grande dame* with the Social Register bosom, brother Chico suddenly shouted from the wings, "The garbage man is here!"

"Tell him we don't want any," replied Groucho.

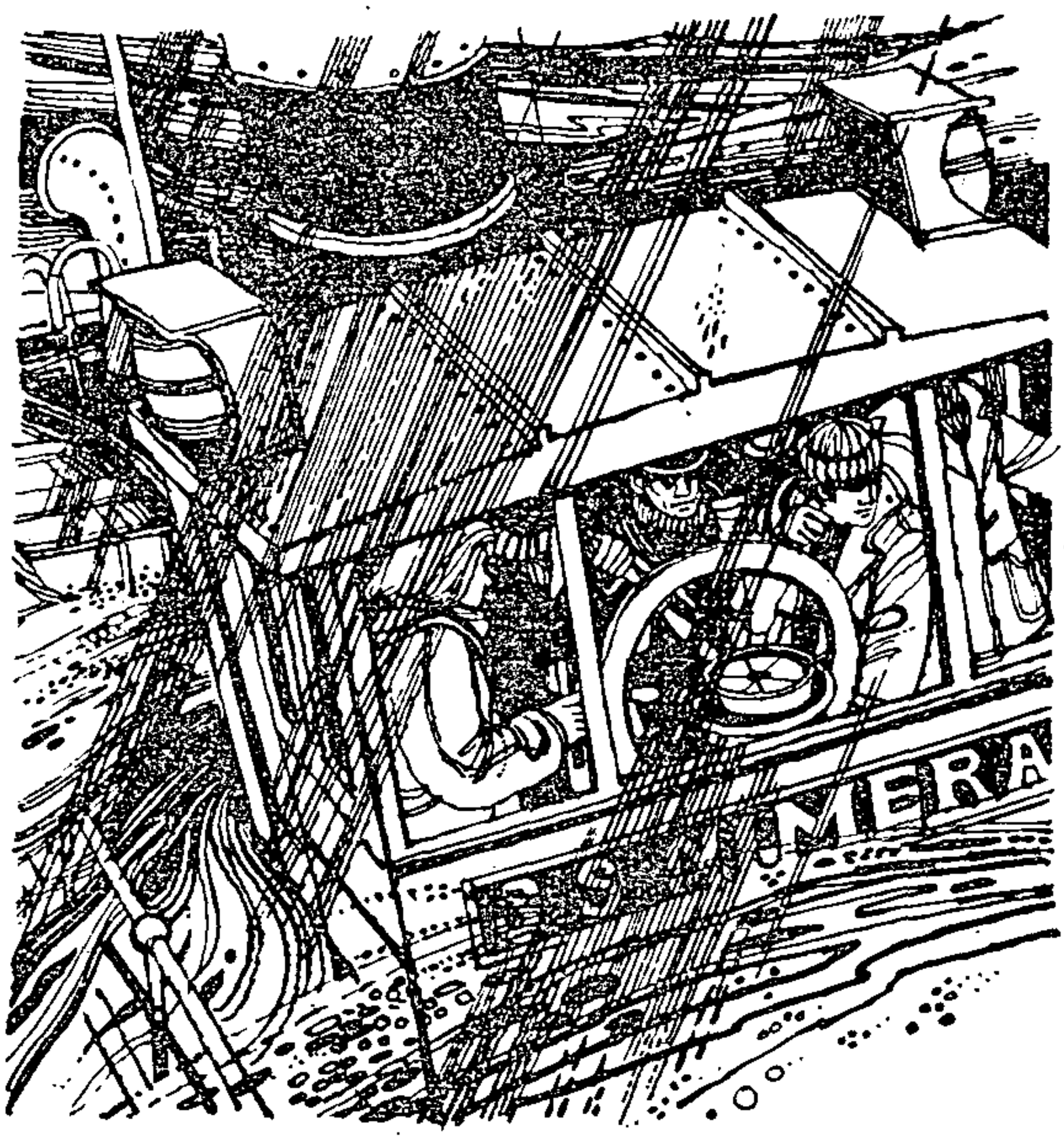
It was on a Broadway stage that Marx, feeling an actor's pulse, scaled Parnassus with the line: "Either this man is dead or my watch has stopped."

His wit, which he delivers with an expression of fine disgust, is a form of surrealism that has made him the pet of intellectuals, logicians, and schizophrenics. His thinking processes (if that is what you can call his rides on a mental roller-coaster) resemble those of the German philosopher who dreamed about a knife without a blade which had no handle. An Einstein of irrelevance, his unhinged reasoning is a good example of what Bertrand Russell calls "the set paradox." To wit: Marx once resigned from a country club with these words: "I do not care to belong to the kind of club that accepts people like me as members."

We approach the end, and I now confess that I undertook this essay with a good deal of uneasiness. I knew that while writing it I would be overcome by the feeling that I was haunted. I especially feared that after Mr. Marx had read what I have written—oh, lord, my telephone is ringing!

© Leo Rosten

"We've decided to increase your expense account."



ONE-TRIPPERS ARE LUCKY

WE WERE known as a wild lot that crewed the *Nimerana*. Some said we deserved to go to sea on a tramp like her, others said that sort of ship deserved us. We knew what they said but it didn't worry us after we got to sea. At the wharf in the city, I think it "stirred the possums" in us as the Kid said, but we never talked about it. We left that to the one-trippers. They talked enough to make up for the lot of us.

by PATSY ADAM SMITH

There is a man in Hobart who has addressed Rotary twice to the title, "The Last Days of the Little Ships," and he only came away for one trip with us. It was he who brought back the story of the engineer who cried, of the old mate who was frightened, of the Kid who slept all-standing, of the woman who swore like a man, of the Captain who had an understanding with the half-caste, of the ship that was a joke. Of all of us that sailed this night in this small ship only he would talk about it.

He stood by himself as we tried to get the ship away and the wharfies chiakked us. As though she knew what was expected of her in a big port dwarfed by overseas liners the little ship behaved like a log. "Yahoo. She's cutting a dido," the Kid called, when her head swung round before her engines got way on her and her bow pivoted towards the *Star of Hope*, a 20,000-ton freighter at the opposite wharf. The deck officer on the freighter grabbed a loud hailer and shouted at us.

"Don't stand there like a shag on a rock," the Kid casually told the one-tripper. "Get a line ashore." The man tried to heave a line but it fell short and splashed into the water. Our 300 tons continued to threaten the white paintwork of the *Star of Hope*. "There's no-one there to take a line," the Kid told the one-tripper carefully and pointed at the empty wharf. "Who do you think you're heaving a line to?"

"Get ashore and shut up," the Captain leaned down to him from the tiny flying bridge. "The tide's got us."

The Kid ran nimbly back amidships and tried to take a turn on the line there and winch the ship closer to the wharf. "Leave it be," the old mate said. "The spring'll take no more strain." The strong coir rope was taut. Without using his hands the Kid kicked off his boots that had no laces, climbed over the railing and more by momentum than balance ran across the line to the dock in his bare feet.

The four men who would handle the lines of the freighter when she should move came to the end of the wharf to watch. "'Struth! Take a gander at this! Did you ever see the likes!"

The one-tripper heaved the line and again it fell short of the wharf. "Here," yelled the Kid. "Tie this to it." From his waist he undid a heavy, fist-sized ball and hurled it with careless precision to the feet of the man on deck. He fumbled making it fast to the heaving line and the small ship's bow

edged nearer the freighter and the Kid standing sturdily on shore threw him construction details, as "You call that a monkey's paw. Yer not by rights allowed to use it of course. Full of nuts and bolts and things."

The man had already loosed the monkey's paw and remembering his earlier attempts threw very hard and it went through the wharf shed skylight. "Told yer it would do the trick." The Kid hauled in the line and refastened the rope-covered ball to his belt where it hung like the dangling decorative balldownie on an aboriginal's G-string. "Come on, you galah. Haul it in." Now he had the mooring line fast but the fight had gone from the new man with the tinkle of falling glass and the Kid had to give him some encouragement to get him on his feet again. "I'll stir the possums in you if I come up there," he encouraged.

Back aft on the stern line the half-caste was trying to hide. He stood behind the mast. That hid him from the girls who looked down from the ship-chandler's building but now the men who lined the freighter's rail could see him. He oozed across behind the horsebox but the horse whinnied and the dark boy took fright and jumped and cried out and the men on shore laughed. "See the whites of his eyes roll!" He was an island boy and did not know horses.

The Captain wore his black cap and black roll-neck sweater and hung to the big wheel up on the flying bridge though only the lines would turn his ship now where the tides swept down river between the man-made piers and wharfs and he didn't look at the officers leaning over the rail of the freighter watching him. Any one of those officers' tickets entitled him to captain a ship this size. "Hey! Skip!" the Kid wanted him.

He looked over the wharf side then spoke down the voice-pipe to the engineer, "Okay. Let her have it," and the engines shook the ship. Then to the Kid, "Get aboard and bring the spring with you."

"Hell!" the Kid said, spat sideways and leapt to release the bowline, ploughed up the wharf to yank the stern line free, ran back amidships and sprang almost as he let the line go and the old mate on the spring hauled him aboard. But the old man had been drinking and he stumbled.

"What a circus!" the girls at the ship-chandler's windows said, and the Kid looked up and saw them looking down and he stuck two fingers up in the air at them and said a word that was a great favourite with him.

And then we were on our way down the river to the open seas with the city left behind.

Robin, the one-tripper, had never been to sea before but even had he been he would have found it difficult to adjust his ways to the small ship. "Where shall I stow my gear?" he asked the Kid, carefully choosing his words.

"What gear?" said the Kid. "Thought you was only coming one trip?"

Robin could not conceal the army kitbag. "Sure, only change of socks, shirt, underpants and things."

"Underpants?" said the Kid. Robin had not before met a man who did not wear underpants.

"Aw, you know, just pyjamas and things."

"Pyjamas!" the Kid said. "Who the hell you think you are? You sleep all-standing down here or you don't sleep at all. Think we're a lot of queers?"

There were six bunks along the side of the ship. Two were used as storage space. The Kid motioned to the kitbag: "Dump your fancy duds up here. The deck'll be awash before we round 'the corner.'" The one-tripper counted the bunks. "There's a cabin each for the Captain and the engineer," the Kid volunteered.

"Where's the woman sleep?".

"Engineer's cabin."

The woman was moving patiently on her great wide feet about the galley, scrubbing the cockroach trails from the bench, preparing the meal, slapping her heavy feet down as though with each step she laid claim to that part of the universe.

"You'll never get a husband with big feet like that," the Kid told her once. "I bet that's how you lost your first husband. There wasn't room for him and your feet." She didn't speak to him any more than to the others but he knew she was amused by him. He knew too that she was amused at her own big feet. "Or was it because the other woman had more money?" She turned away in the minute kitchen but she was smiling. "Oh I know how to handle women," the Kid told them up topside.

He was sent down to the engine room with the one-tripper. "I don't reckon he'll have anything for you," he said. "He don't like no-hopers muckin' about with his engines. I tried to tighten a bolt once and he up and snottered me." The engineer put them to work folding up and storing the sacks he had protecting the deck plates from the oily boots of

the shore engineers. "He's a real old woman," the Kid whispered hoarsely.

Down in his hollow beneath the sea, the burrow they called it, the engineer tended the only thing that had ever been his in his lifetime. The engine was old and the ship's owners being ousted from the trade by faster, larger, more economical vessels couldn't afford new parts. All replacements were make-do but the whole shone and gleamed till it lifted the cavern with its iridescence. The engineer walked round and round, a bundle of cotton waste in one hand, a can of oil in the other.

"Cop that," the Kid whispered again.

"What's he doing?" the one-tripper asked.

"Listening." The engineer was looking nowhere but it seemed to the watchers that his ear was an eye and its pupil was dilating as it tried to pinpoint the flaw. "I've seen him race down from topside when none of the rest of us heard nothing," the Kid said. The ear-eyes had it now and the scrawny sandy man's hand reached out and adjusted a screw.

There was scarcely space in the tomb-like room for a man to stand. For him to move he must sidle sideways along between the engine and the bulkhead. The only space, that under the workbench, was taken up with a stretcher. "His cot," the Kid whispered above the noise of the engine. "Sleeps here. Even eats here sometimes."

When they climbed the iron ladder and were in the sun and the salt air again the Kid concluded, "Told yer! A real nut. He's only been at sea five years. Used to be in a tractor factory. His wife's got the size of him. She got drunk and came down to haul him home when he worked back one night. The engines must be attended to; I'm the engineer, he told her. 'Engineer?' she said. 'Bloody donk driver!' You'd never believe it but he sat down and bawled like a kid. Funny bloke."

There was little for a one-tripper to do while we were steaming. The mate showed him how to steer and he made a good fist of it but then we came to 'the corner' and he got sick. "You'll be right when we get her round the bend," the mate told him. "She's doing a corkscrew. That's why you feel bad. Bad cross currents here. Always bad at 'the corner.'"

The corner is the turbulent water battering the southern end of the Tasmanian-Australian land mass, craggy cliffs a

thousand feet high that we must round to head up north to the east coast. Here nothing breaks the sea between us and Cape Horn. The one-tripper looked up as he leaned over the side and saw the cliff. "Why the hell do we have to go so close?"

"When you only make seven knots you don't waste those seven heading out to sea," the mate was terse. It was an hour since his last drink.

Robin was still sick when we unloaded the horse at Maria Island. There, living alone since the end of the First World War was an old South African and his wife. We called once a month, anchoring in the bay and sending a boat ashore. The Kid went ashore today to rout out the old man and get him to bring a halter to the beach while the horse was lowered over the side of the ship in the horsebox, then freed through the trap door and swum ashore by the half-caste. The Captain wrestled with the guy ropes and hauled the box back inboard and shouted advice to the rider in the sea. "Stick to him. He's just as frightened of you as you are of him. Ride him, cowboy."

A bull was to have been brought off the island, but the old settler and his wife were still trying to round it up. While he waited for the half-caste to coax the horse ashore, the Kid went into the bush to watch the mustering, and shortly after the watchers on the ship saw him hurtle out of the scrub and down the beach with the bull close behind.

"Watch it, Kid," the Captain called. "He thinks you're a cow." The Kid doubled back to the bush. "Hey! you're going the wrong way. Run to the water. Lead him to the ship." But the bull had gone for this day.

No-one asked Robin if he were well enough to work when we reached the little timber jetty. "Let's have yer!" the mate's bellow brought us on deck. "Let's have yer!"

All that night and the next day and its night the whole crew loaded timber while the woman tallied it aboard and alternately cooked the meals. The timber, green boards, was wirebound into packs, fifteen feet by three by three, that caused the derrick to groan and creak as each pack swung aboard and was lowered into the hold where the men levered and heaved with the iron crowbars to stow it in place.

Heave-ho, heave-ho, heave, we worked, stripped to the waist, sweat stinking down in the airless pit. The work and the roll of the ship at the wharf and the weariness when the second day came, sent waves of nausea breaking over us.

During the second night the engineer was sick all over a pack as he levered it, heave-ho, heave-ho. Each foot weighed a ton and our heads were too big and too light and our eyes burnt and our tempers flared and every cut was agony and then we got our second wind and went at it afresh. When the hold was full the hatch covers were put on and the rest of the load was stacked on the deck, pack by heavy twisting pack, until the load reached the height of the wheel-house windows.

As the last pack was swung aboard, the chains made fast round the load and stayed to the derrick, now resting in its cradle near the wheelhouse, the Captain climbed through the window on to the bridge: "Okay. Let go for'ard. Let go aft." The engines ticked over, the lines came aboard and we were steaming for home.

The old mate was dead beat. No drink for two days. "She'll be having it on by the time we get to the corner." He looked at the sky as he headed for the paint locker where he hid his rum. "There's a wind up there would blow the horns off a bull."

The storm caught us when we were about to turn the cape —the corner. It came down behind us and lifted the old ship on top of a mountain and then dropped her in a well-deep void. Nowhere else between here and the Horn does the sea make as quickly

When the first wall of water hit, every man came to the wheelhouse. The woman stood by the telegraph. By the time we had dropped down the valley twice the one-tripper came up. "What happened?" he said. No-one spoke. The night had fallen on us, with the storm and the squalls and the roar that thundered down the wind. You couldn't see a yard in front of the ship. We sailed within a tent made dark by fierce elements, struggling for air, for vision. "Where are we going?" said the newcomer. The spume sprayed back green and red from where the port and starboard lights were forced in upon us.

"We're heading for hell," the Captain said, and the one-tripper laughed. We didn't laugh. Those that had headed for hell before this didn't like it, and those of us that hadn't didn't want to. We call it heading for hell when we can't get round the corner, when the sea is such that to turn a ship our size would be to capsize it. Then there is nothing left for it but to keep charging southwards with nothing

between us and the wastelands of the Antarctic. Heading for hell, we call it.

The storm bore us along; the noise of our going added to the sense of increased speed. "At this rate of knots we'll go clean over the South Pole and never know it till we find it sticking up our . . ." the Kid stoppered his mouth when the woman made a sound.

"Sticking up our deck like a mizzen mast," the old mate helped him out.

The Captain had the wheel. He spoke to the mate: "How long since we ran past the corner?"

The mate turned up the light under the compass card and looked at his watch. He turned the light back to its dull glow. "Twenty-five minutes." After a while: "I don't reckon it's going to break!" The mate went out on deck and as he went the open door let in a blast of wind and a chill rain that swept across the crowded room.

When he came back he said, "Won't break till morning. Eight, nine hours."

One-trippers are lucky. There's a lot of things they don't know. Mostly they don't know that small ships don't have radar, nor gyro compasses nor echo-sounders nor any of the other aids to navigation that the ships that make a profit do have. We've got just what Columbus and Drake and the rest of them had and our ships are their size. As well, we've got shore lights, that's why we're accused of rock-hopping, dog-barking navigation. Come to think of it we've got less than Drake and the rest of them because we haven't deep-sea experience or knowledge. Once we lose sight of the rocks and the sound of the dogs we're lost.

"Stand by!" The Captain rang the engine-room telegraph and blew the whistle down the voice-pipe. When the engineer answered, his voice sounding from his tomb beneath the sea, the Captain said, "We'll have a go. Everything okay?"

"Yep," said the scrawny man beneath us. "She's sweet."

The half-caste went to one side of the big wheel, the Kid the other. The Captain still had the ship. "You take the telegraph," he ordered the woman. The old mate's job would be out on deck if the manœuvre failed. The dim light in the compass lantern showed the card only, the globe in the telegraph the words of command: full ahead, half ahead, slow ahead, the same astern, plus stand by, stop, and finished with engines.

For a while we stood thus, none moving except the skipper

as he lay on the wheel weighing it with his strength this way, paying off that, his eyes peering out through the blackness, conning the ship, awaiting his chance, his lips silently counting the great rolling seas as they came. Twice he started again, one, two, three, then, "Okay. Ready." We were ready. The mate didn't move, standing by the door, the young woman looked steadily at the face of the telegraph, her back to the others, the half-caste and the Kid put their hands to the wheel to get the feel of her but they wouldn't take the weight until ordered by the man silently counting and peering and feeling the sea through the soles of his boots.

Then, "Give it to her!" The woman chopped the telegraph lever once, FULL AHEAD, and snap! down again, the unmarked command, "All she's got!" The bells slit a split in the shrill of the wind. "*Now!*" The half-caste dragged the spokes up from the deck, the Captain dragged them over the top and the Kid dragged them down to the deck on the other side. Again. Up, over, down, a spoke at a time. Again. The ship didn't answer. "You clapped-out old bitch!" There is less than one and one-half minutes to get her round or she will broach on the next big sea. "Ring for more." Again the shrill clang once, twice, answered from the bell buried below. The engineer opened her to the end. She could last a hundred seconds on this and then her engines would be finished. Again up from the deck, over and down. We worked in silence while we waited and then we felt her start to spin, pitting her wooden stern against the ocean. Silence. Then, "Come on, you bitch. Faster." He wanted her round. "The daddy of them all's coming. Keep her open," he shouted down the voice-pipe.

"Yep." The engineer knew it wouldn't be asked for if it wasn't needed but the fumes and the heat and the thud in the cylinder heads told him what it was doing to his engines. We were almost round when it hit us. It picked up with all unspeakable power our 300 tons, rolled us sideways, hit us amidships then bowled us down a valley. The jitter of our propeller sounded above the wind as it bit air, clean out of the water. We fell. It seemed we would hit the floor of the ocean. All the sea was up above us. If someone threaded a line about the crest of the waves and pulled it tight they would have us in an air bag inside the sea.

"Single," said the Captain, and the woman swung the lever, the bells rang out and the engine was relieved. We were on course, due north into the wind. "You little beauty,

you bottler! I knew you could do it." The wave followed us down into the trough, we rode to the top on it, it pushed us sideways out of its way and disappeared into the waste-land of heaving ocean. We recovered slowly, rolling sluggishly, groaning, creaking.

"I bet that shifted something," the Kid said. We didn't have long to wait. Out on the deck the mate was shouting.

We opened the big wheelhouse window to hear. "The load's walking—" The ship came up on a wave and rolled again—"*Look out!*" The derrick had left its cradle and swung free, whaling its tree-trunk length of heavy timber from side to side as the ship rolled. To the derrick the chains securing the timber packs had been made fast; now, snapped like string, they had parted. Again the derrick swung and we, in the shelter of the wheelhouse, ducked with the old mate on deck as though this murderous swinging pole menaced us. Again it swung and this time it jerked as the ship rolled and once more.

"Get that light on." The wind blew the mate's words around. Again the ship jerked as the derrick swung. The searchlight bored a tunnel in the black void and we crowded round the window to see the damage as the ship rolled. And we saw it...

The timber, now undisciplined by chains, was moving its great packs and with every roll of the ship lurched farther to starboard. Already we were listing. The Kid said that word again and, "We're going to turn turtle."

"The stick'll be dragged out first," the Captain said, as the stay whipped and snapped taut at the masthead each time the derrick lurched. In the light of the big lamp we peered up to the top of the mast where the stay was foul of the mainhead block. "We'll have to clear that block."

The Captain gave the wheel to the Kid. "Rather you than me," the Kid said. "Hell! You wouldn't catch me up there!"

The Captain climbed out of the window on to the drunken timber packs where the half-caste was helping the mate. "I can't do it," the old mate said. "I haven't got the strength." He pushed the six-foot crowbar into the Captain's hand. "I'll go aloft," and he climbed over the reeling packs and out on to the bulwarks and round to the rigging where the ratlines swayed and twitched away from his grasp and the sea rolled right over him before he got clear and began to climb.

He knew every third or fourth rung on the ratlines was broken and had been tied by string to present a shipshape appearance, but there was no way to tell which rungs were damaged until he put his weight on them. Up he went, one foot firmly after the other, waiting between the dizzy swings of the ship when he clung with his legs around the stays. Twice he fell. Once he slipped through and straddled the next rung down on his crotch, a leg either side. And the old man cried out and hung on with his arms round the ratlines and cradled between his legs with his hands. Then he started up again.

Down on deck the half-caste retrieved the chains and climbed on his hands and knees on top of the timber to bring them to the Captain. The Captain with the crowbar was trying to lever the unwieldy packs back into place. The stink of his sweat and its beads washed off with the seawrack when the sea in a sullen slick rolled over them. In the darkness they couldn't find a second crowbar. The half-caste grabbed the deck pump handle and took it as a bar. He climbed up beside the Captain and thrust with him. "Heave . . ." they levered a pack across an inch, six inches. "Again. Ugh, ugh, ugh." They heaved together. At times they used one another's body for leverage. "*Heave. Ugh, ugh, ugh.*"

From up at the masthead came the voice of the mate. For a time they couldn't pluck his words from the music that came down from the shrilling of the stays and the contrapuntal thrumming of the sea on her timbers. Then, "He wants a marline-spike." The Captain couldn't leave the timber now; crowbarred high in the stack but, still unbound, the danger on deck was worse.

"I'll take it," the Kid called. "Robin'll have the wheel." The one-tripper hadn't been asked to help that night. Now, "Keep her head up into it," and the Kid was climbing out on to the timber.

"Watch it!" the Captain shouted. "You'll be jake."

The Kid was so frightened he climbed stiffly, hardly able to bend his knees to rise to the next rung. He went up to the old man who was waiting for the spike and then he began to come down. He felt with his foot the missing bar but misjudged the distance down to the next and slipped a few inches holding on by his arms and legs tight knotted round the rigging in fear, and this saved him as up in the wheel-house the one-tripper let go of the wheel and walked across to shut the window. In the same moment, as the ship

reeled to the sea and the timber screeched as it began to roll against the two men and their bars, and the Captain screamed like a horse as he slipped and his arm fell between two packs—the sea silenced for an instant, and in that silence the clear hard voice of the woman carried out over the storm. She spoke to the one-tripper in a way and with such words that caused the Kid clinging to the rope to look around in the darkness. "Hey!" he said in admiration and began to come down.

The timber lurched again as the ship was brought back on to course and the Captain, off balance with his arm pinned, fell between the packs as they opened. Quick as a flash the half-caste leapt down in the gape with him and straining back with his buttocks and forwards with his knees he held the vice apart while the man climbed out and the vice began to close on the coloured boy. The Captain leaned down and thrust the short handle of the deck pump between the packs and hauled the boy out. They rolled back on the timber; the warmth of their thighs meeting through the cold slap of their wet trouser legs. Then they stood up and together began to lever back the packs. "Heave, heave, heave." "Ugh, ugh, ugh."

In the river the rain ceased and the sky cleared and in the light of day the sea rolling out in the bay no longer had the force and the grandeur and the terrible menace of the night. There was nothing about the ship to show the travail she had been through, she looked as scruffy as ever; the men looked much as they always did, unshaven, dirty, untidy. They drank mugs of cocoa stiff with sugar as they headed up the river to the port.

"I was frightened up that mast," the Kid admitted. "I nearly wet myself with fright."

"I did," the mate said. He was very drunk. The one-tripper sat looking at him. The old man told him, "It's a great relief when you're frightened. Helps you to hang on. It's not so bad after."

The one-tripper said, "That woman kicked me." The Captain thought of those big flat feet and grinned.

"Where?"

"In the middle of the back."

"Away up there?"

"Yeah, she pinned me to the wheel so I couldn't let go again."

The silence of the other men might have pleased the woman if anything pleased her any more. "I thought she wouldn't say damn for sixpence," the Kid said reflectively. "Hell! I never heard such a recitation!"

Then we were going into our berth, rubbing more paint off our side as we scraped up and down the wharf while the Kid and the half-caste scrambled over the side and scampered about making the lines fast.

"Been on the four-day circus?" the wharfies said to the one-tripper. He'd thought it was more than four days. "Who does she belong to?" They indicated the woman as she plodded by on her big feet, her soles gripping the asphalt with each step. She heard the watersiders remark, "It wouldn't be half bad on a cold night at sea." She smiled at that and hurried on to disappear in the streets of the city. The Kid went across to the small hotel on Salamanca Place where he argued and fought, and swapped obscenities and drank and waited for the time when he should walk across to the small ship and go away.

The half-caste had kept on walking after he put the lines ashore and was already near the shack so far out of the city that the street was called a gully and the people laughed and drank and danced and made love with the money he was bringing home. The mate and the engineer went part of the way together. Neither was in a hurry. When they parted the mate took a bus to his daughter's place where he was introduced as being in the Merchant Service, and the engineer went to his wife and her house. The Captain went to sleep there at the wharf on the *Nimerana* and waited for us all to come back.

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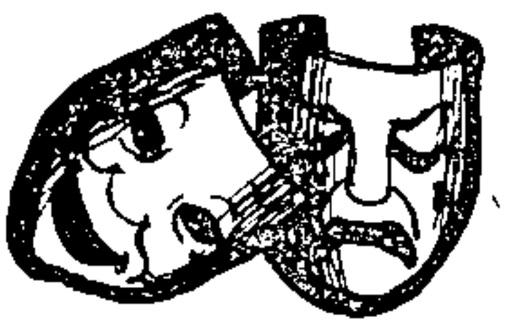
◈ Incredible as it may seem, this story *was* written by a woman. But Patsy Adam Smith is no ordinary woman.

The daughter of an Australian fettler, she's been a nurse, music teacher and, with a combination of writing and photography, is one of Australia's most prolific feature writers.

Six years ago she signed articles on a tramp steamer working as a cook, loading cargo and finally as a radio operator—the first woman to hold such a job in Australian waters. This achievement crowned her seafaring career.



Stage Frights

I SHALL not easily forget a production of *Henry V* which coincided with an influenza epidemic. We were always one player short in any case. It was a sort of floating gap, filled each night by whomever could get into the messenger's costume in time. If nobody achieved this then the stage manager bellowed something from the wings and the King edged his way across and held converse with an invisible man.

The epidemic, however, made things much worse. No-one knew what part he would have to play next. Mysterious messages would be left at the office during the day—"Mr. Green, someone rang to say you are Lord Scroop tonight. Does that make sense?"

Worse still, you would turn up at the theatre all unsuspecting, and be making-up as Bardolph or some such harmless rôle, when the stage manager would approach, thrust a heap of armour into your arms and say, "Bert's ill. You're doubling the Earl of Essex tonight . . ."

It was hardly surprising that as a result I died after a sword fight which I should have won. Actually it was a little awkward because the other chap also died and we both tottered away clutching our vitals without having touched each other.

There was a nasty silence and the audience became restive. I managed to roll over and look at my script when I saw that I was supposed to make a speech over my opponent's bleeding corpse. Fortunately I had enough presence of mind to stagger to my feet in a manner which suggested I was merely winded and say a quick epitaph.

The climax came when even with everyone doubling two or three parts, there just weren't enough men to go round. The only thing left to do was to cut the play as we went along.

It was the quickest performance of *Henry V* on record. Whole episodes of English history vanished. The French court was reduced to one man. I don't think the battle of Agincourt ever took place. In the end we discovered we had done it in five minutes over the hour, which as far as I know is a world record. The audience cheered like mad.

MICHAEL GREEN, *The Art of Coarse Acting*

Her expression assumed a secret excitement

WOMAN FROM THE PROVINCES

by JOSEPH KESSEL

BEFORE the last war, there was a bar in the rue Fromentin kept by a man who, though still young, had been a very rich businessman in Moscow. Now, from behind his counter, he watched his nightly customers with an attentive eye. They were nearly all Russian. Musicians, singers out of a job, people who had finished work, newspaper sellers, night-birds short of cash, came here to eat caviare and cheap *pirojki*, and drink vodka at modest cost.

The sound of a guitar and battered voices was often to be heard, for music and singing are so much a part of the Russian's very fibre that even those who had played and sung all night to earn their livings began again immediately afterwards for their own pleasure.

There were often fights, for a good deal of drinking went on and nerves were taut among people on whom memory acted like an open wound. Strange ghosts wandered there, their faces bearing the traces of poverty, heedlessness and former splendour. In short, it was an extraordinary enough place and, at one time, I used to go there every night.

One of the *habitués* who interested me most was a Cossack called Stiopa. Not that he had much to say for himself. Indeed, he had no conversation at all. He was always drunk. But it was precisely his silence, his incapacity for thought or memory and his animality which attracted me.

He had a way of making his entrance, his astrakhan cap over one ear and showing wild, curly red hair, of placing

his hands on his hips over which a crimson tunic fitted tightly, of looking round with a glance which was at once drunken, bold and cruel, which compelled one to recognise that he was a man born for war and orgy, for vaulting on to a horse and for dancing to the sound of frenzied cries, for the simplest and most violent forms of lust and for easily accepted death.

Habitués of the little bar had told me that, in 1914, he had belonged to the crack squadrons, known as the wild squadrons, that he had charged barbed wire on horseback, and during the Revolution had served with many leaders of bands and had massacred with Makhno.

What did this horseman with no other law but that of battle, carnage and orgy do in Paris? On what did he live?

No-one knew, but each evening he kicked the door of the bar open, his red mouth wide in a ferocious, silent smile, went straight to the counter where he drank off two glasses of vodka, and then sat down at a table where he stood drinks to people whose faces he liked. He never left till dawn, terribly drunk and his hand on his dagger. It was a miracle he had never drawn it. And lucky too. I had seen him fight with bare hands, and there had been the lust to kill.

One night, when he had stood me a drink as usual, and a

guitarist who had played for Rasputin was talking to me about that lubricious, crafty, obscene and fascinating Siberian mujik, we saw a woman come in. Her appearance was unusual for that place and attracted everyone's attention. She was wearing a worn coat whose cloth and cut were seldom to be seen in Paris. Her skirt was much longer than fashion decreed. Beneath her shabby, tasteless hat, she wore a thick bun.

And this woman, who seemed like a fish out of water in Montmartre, came and sat at our table. Stiopa, the Cossack, was the only one of us not to be surprised. He signed to her to sit beside him. He then continued to drink in silence. The woman waited for him till morning without uttering a word, or having a drink. They went off together.

I had plenty of opportunity for observing this strange creature. In spite of her graceless clothes, I noticed that she was still young and had great charm due to the tender expression of her mouth, the grave sadness and, when she looked at Stiopa, the expression of love evident in her regular features.

She returned the next day and, by the way she said to me, before sitting down by Stiopa, " I beg your pardon, monsieur," I realised that she was French and well-educated.

I felt a certain uneasiness, indeed almost a sense of dread. What was the relationship between these two? Between the cut-throat with the silent, terrible laugh, and this woman from the provinces with her reserve, her good manners and her gentleness?

No-one could give me the slightest information. No-one had ever seen the woman before the previous evening. And when my curiosity, encouraged by alcohol and lack of sleep, eventually brought me to the pitch of asking Stiopa directly who his companion was, he merely shrugged his wide, hard shoulders and said, " Her name's Berthe."

Hearing her name uttered by that barbarous voice, the woman's face quivered and then her whole body. Her expression, normally so decent and so modest, assumed a sort of secret excitement, a voluptuous subjection, before becoming wholly immobile once more.

From then on, I saw her every night. The group who joined Stiopa paid as little attention to Berthe as he did himself. She sat there, neither drinking nor eating, understanding nothing of what was said, until the moment came when the drunken Cossack wished to leave. Then she followed him.

Little by little, I got on terms with Berthe, despite her natural shyness and the profound and inevitable embarrassment the place caused her. I was the only person who could speak fluently the language of her country, which seemed so far away amid these high-cheekboned faces, these Cossack clothes, Tziganes, and the foreign food and drink.

After a week, Berthe was quite willing to talk to me. And the better I got to know her, the more surprised I became. She was not only well brought up, but she was subtle and cultivated. She would make remarks about literature and music which revealed both extensive knowledge and discriminating taste. And beside her sat this man with his cut-throat head, his grimace, his killer's hand and his perpetual drunkenness . . .

Though I did not dare question Berthe directly, I tried by various subterfuges and suggestions to discover her origins and the secret of her liaison. But, as soon as she felt my curiosity awakening, however little, Berthe withdrew into herself with something approaching panic.

Yet, there came a time, as inevitably happens during those sleepless nights which exhaust the nerves and cause feverish lips to utter the most secret and repressed of confidences, when Berthe talked.

Stiopa, the Cossack, always arrived first. His mistress joined him only rather late at night.

He usually came alone. Yet, one night, accompanying Stiopa's ritual kick against the bar door, there was a gay little laugh. There was a young woman with him. She was dressed as a Cossack. I recognised her as a dancer from a Russian nightclub nearby.

" I'm in the money," Stiopa cried. " This is a party."

He invited everyone present to as much vodka or red wine as they could drink. The whole climate changed quickly. The guitars—there were always several about—began to play of their own accord. Stiopa sent for an accordion and began to play too.

It was as if this man, who could not talk, had found his means of expression. All his innate savagery, restrained by the customs of a great city, all his thirst for the open spaces, for adventure and battle, all his wild soul and primitive heart sounded through the notes of the accordion, as he squeezed it with his terrible hands. It was a pæan of naked instinct.

It was an extraordinary sight to see Stiopa, in his red tunic

and shining boots, erect, on tiptoe, his wild body supported, as it were, by the waves of music, and his accordion crying under his fingers like an avowal. The whole room fell under the sway of his forceful ascendancy till the instrument ceased singing.

It was only then I saw that Berthe was present. I scarcely recognised her. It was as if Stiopa's delirious music had sculpted this woman from the provinces a new face. Her eyes were wide and moist, her cheeks were aflame and her lips were parted in a troubled smile. She was breathing with the difficult respiration of a woman subject to desire.

Suddenly she turned pale. Stiopa was kissing the girl dressed as a Cossack on the mouth.

He then threw a thousand-franc note to a violinist, who had come to drink a brandy during an interval of the band, and ordered him to play a *lesghinka.* Scarcely had the first chords of the Caucasian dance rung out, when the dancer was whirling among the tables. The guitars joined in. Everyone began shouting and Stiopa partnered her in the dance.

It was at this point I felt a quivering shoulder against mine and heard Berthe murmur, "Tell me, monsieur, you know him, is he going to leave me for that girl? I'm not the right woman for him, I know. I was married to a professor in the East. Then, he came to work for us as a gardener last summer. I went off with him. He wanted to enlist in the Foreign Legion because he had no money. I managed to earn some. I go every day to a . . . brothel. He doesn't need much to come here and stand drinks . . . We scarcely speak to each other. He only knows about ten words of French, but I understand him so well. He's a savage, a child. I know very well he'll leave me one day, but not yet . . . please, beg him, not yet."

When Stiopa had spent the money an American had paid him for kidnapping his little girl from his divorced wife, he went off to the Legion.

Berthe no longer came to the rue Fromentin.

My curiosity about the night life of Paris soon led me elsewhere . . .

Two or three years later, a lecture tour took me from one big town to another through the French provinces. My subject was Soviet literature. There were always many students and university teachers in the audience. The last town of my tour was Strasbourg.

I knew my lecture by heart, having delivered it a dozen times in the last few days. And yet, on this occasion, the opening words escaped me.

A couple had just taken their seats in the front row, immediately opposite the platform.

I recognised the woman as Berthe. There could be no doubt of it. Our eyes had met and she had greeted me with a brief nod.

Berthe, Stiopa's mistress, the prostitute from the brothels, was here in this peaceful and studious assembly!

With some difficulty I set about saying what I had to say. Then, the mechanism began to function. The familiar words followed each other of their own accord.

From time to time, taking advantage of a pause, toying with a glass of water, I looked rapidly and furtively at the couple.

But it was no longer Berthe who was compelling my attention, but the man sitting beside her.

Was he her husband? It certainly seemed so. There is a comportment, a mutuality, a habit between two bodies, between two beings, which cannot deceive one. And then, in the rue Fromentin, the night of the wild accordion, Berthe had said,

"I was married to a professor in the East."

Little by little, secret glance by secret glance, I took in his features: square, clean-cut, a wide serene forehead and a singularly well-shaped mouth. He was listening intently but without effort as only men engaged in high intellectual work are able to do.

After the lecture, students came up to ask me questions. When we had done, the hall was empty.

As I was leaving, an usher handed me a note. It was from Berthe and read:

I have concealed nothing from him. Life has returned to what it was before.

What it was before—that is to say, ordered, protected, with dinner-parties among the staff, visits to other husbands and wives, concerts played by touring companies, lectures . . .

Who could have imagined that in such a life there had been so incredible an interlude, so crazy an escapade, such a flight into hell?

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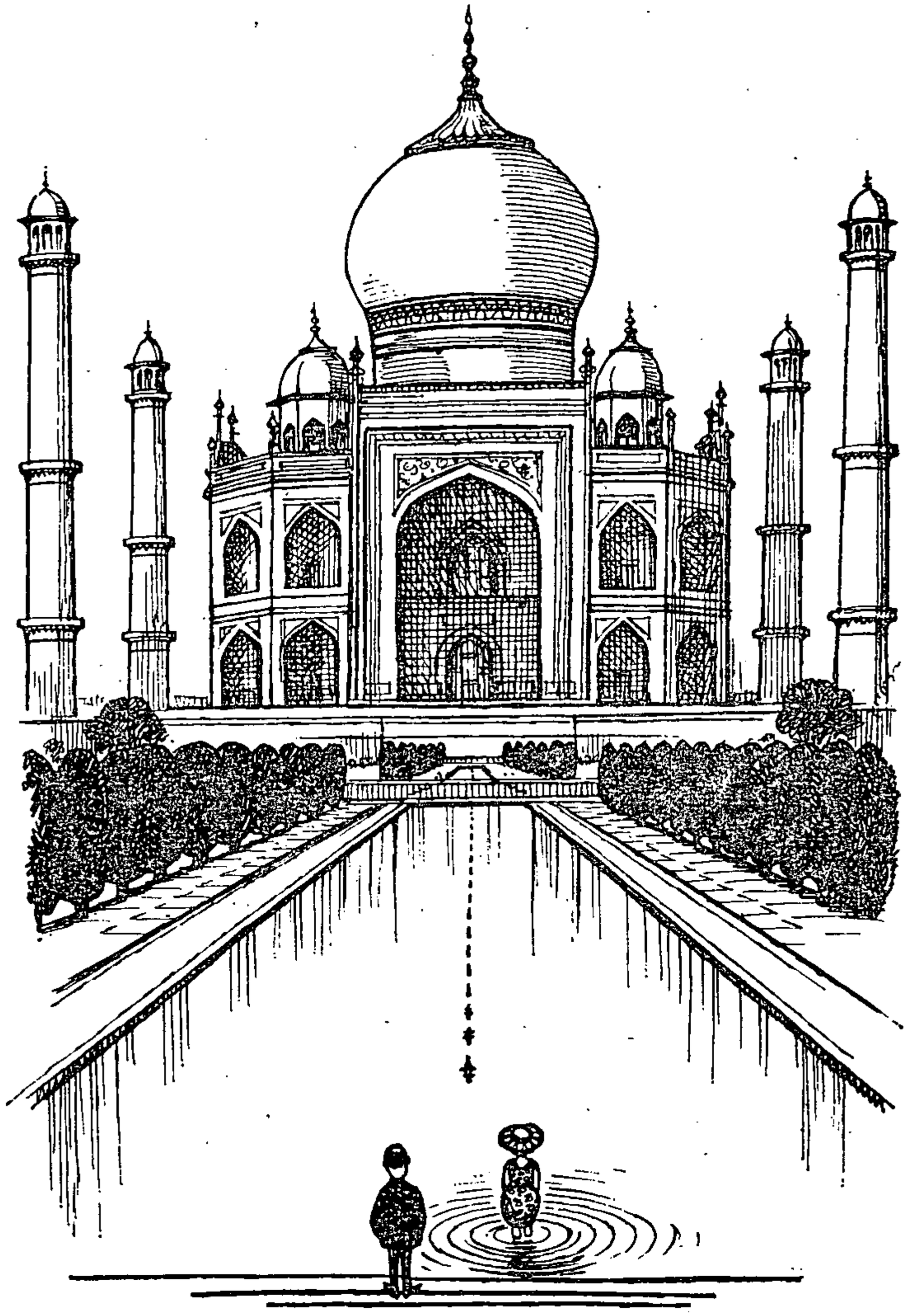
Translated from the French by Humphrey Hare, from "They Weren't All Angels"

AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD . . .

BY THELWELL



" It's absolutely exquisite!—my feet were killing me."

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BRIDE FOR THE SAHIB

by Khushwant Singh

"WHAT can I do for you, gentlemen?"

Mr. Sen asked the question without looking up. He pushed the cleaner through the stem of his pipe and twirled it around. As he blew through it, his eye fell on the rose-and-marigold garlands in the hands of his callers. So they knew that he had been married that morning! He had tried to keep the news quiet. But, as he had learned so often before, nothing remained a secret for long in his nosy native land.

He screwed the bowl on to the stem and blew through the pipe again. Through his lowered eyes he saw his visitors shuffling their feet and nudging each other. He unwrapped his plastic tobacco pouch and began filling the pipe. After an uneasy minute of subdued whispers, one of the men cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr. Bannerjee, what is your problem?" asked Mr. Sen, in a flat monotone.

"Saar," began the superintendent of the clerical staff, "whee came to wheesh your good shelph long leephe and happee-nesh." He beckoned to the *chaprassi*: "Garland the shahib."

The *chaprassi* stepped in front with garlands held aloft. The sahib stopped them with a wave of his pipe. "*Mez par*—on the table," he commanded, in his gentle but firm voice. The *chaprassi*'s hand came down slowly; fawning smiles changed to stupid grins. They put the garlands on the table and stepped behind the semicircle of clerks.

"If that is all," said Mr. Sen, standing up, "we can get back to our work. I thank you gentlemen for your good wishes." He bowed slightly to indicate that they should leave. "Bannerjee, will you look in later to discuss the redistribution of work while I am away?"

"Shuttenly, saar."

The men joined the palms of their hands, murmured their *namastes*, and filed out . . .

Sen joined his hands across his waistband and watched the smoke from his pipe rise in a lazy spiral towards the ceiling. A new chapter in his life had begun. That's how Hindus described marriage: the third of the four stages of life, according to the *Vedas*. It was alarming, he reflected, how his thought processes slipped into clichés and Hinduism extended its tentacles into practically every sphere of life.

His father had not been a particularly orthodox Hindu and had sent him to an Anglo-Indian school where the boys had changed his name from Santosh to Sunny. Thereafter, he had gone to Balliol. He had entered the Administrative Service before the Independent Indian Government with its new-fangled nationalist ideas had made Hindi and a vernacular language compulsory. His inability to speak an Indian language hadn't proved a handicap. As a matter of fact, it impressed most Indians. Although his accent and mannerisms made him somewhat of an outsider, this situation was more than compensated for by the fact that it also put him outside the vicious circles of envy and backbiting in which all the others indulged. They sought his company because he was an un-Indian Indian, because he was a brown British gentleman, because he was what the English contemptuously described as a Wog—a westernised Oriental gentleman.

Sen's main contact with his country was his mother. Like an orthodox Hindu widow she shaved her head, only wore a plain white sari, and went in bare feet. He was her only child, so they both did the best they could for each other. She ran his home. Sometimes he ate rice, curried fish, and the sticky, over-sweetened confections she made on special occasions. Other times she had the bearer cook him the lamb chops and the shepherd's pie he liked better. She had converted one of the rooms to a temple where she burnt incense and tinkled bells to a diminutive image of the black-faced, red-tongued goddess Kali. But she never insisted on his joining her in worship.

Although he detested Indian movies, he made it a point to take her to one every month. She, at her end, did not object to his taking his evening Scotch and soda or smoking in her presence. She never questioned him about his movements. They got on extremely well till she began talking about his

getting married. At first he had laughed it off. She became insistent and started to nag him. She wanted to see him properly settled. She wanted to fondle a grandson just once before she died, she said, with tears in her eyes. At last he gave in. He did not have strong views on marriage or on whom he would marry. Since he had come back to settle in India, he could do no worse than marry one of his country-women. "All right, Ma, you find me a wife. I'll marry anyone you want me to marry," he said one day.

His mother did not bring up the subject again for many days. She wrote to her brother living in Dehra Dun, in the Himalayan foothills, to come down to Delhi. The two drafted an advertisement for the matrimonial columns and asked for insertions in two successive Sunday editions of the *Hindustan Times*. It read:

> **Wanted: a fair, good-looking virgin of a high-class respectable family for an Oxford-educated Bengali youth of 25 drawing over Rs. 1000 p.m. in first-class gazetted Government Service. Applicant should be conversant with HH affairs. C and D no bar. Correspond with horoscope. PO Box No. 4200**

The first insertion brought over fifty letters from parents who enclosed not only the horoscopes of their daughters but photographs to prove that they were fair and therefore good-looking. A fortnight later the applications were sorted out and Sunny's mother and uncle triumphantly laid out nearly a hundred pictures on the large dining table. Virginity and the capacity to deal with household affairs had, of necessity, to be taken on trust. But, despite the professed indifference to the C and D, the applicants selected for consideration were of the same caste as the Sens and had fathers who had made offers of substantial dowries. Now it was for Sunny to choose.

This was the first time that Sunny had heard of the matrimonial advertisement. He was very angry and acutely embarrassed: some anxious parents had travelled up all the way from Calcutta, bribed the clerks concerned at the newspapers, and called on him at his office. He told his mother firmly that, if the harassment did not stop, he would call off the whole thing—but, as he had given his word, he would accept anyone chosen for him.

His mother and uncle quickly settled the matter by selecting a girl whose father not only promised the largest dowry but offered to give a substantial portion of it as earnest money at the betrothal ceremony. The parties took the horoscopes of the affianced couple to a Pandit who consulted the stars and,

having had his palm crossed with silver, pronounced the pair ideally suited to each other and the dates that suited the parties to be most auspicious.

That was as much as Sunny Sen could take. He told them quite bluntly that he would be married at the Registry or not at all. His mother and uncle sensed his mounting irritation and gave in. The bride's parents made a nominal protest: the cost of a wedding on the traditional pattern, which included feasting the bridegroom's party and relations, giving presents, and paying the priests, could run into thousands of rupees. The registrar's fee was only Rs. 5.

That was how Srijut Santosh Sen came to marry Kumari Kalyani, the eldest of Srijut Profulla and Srimati Protima Das' five daughters. Mr. Das was, like his son-in-law, a first-class gazetted government servant.

The honeymoon also created difficulties. Sen's mother blushed as if he had said something improper. The Das family was outraged at the suggestion that their daughter should go away for a fortnight unaccompanied by a younger sister. But they resigned their daughter to her fate. Her husband had been brought up as a sahib and she must follow his ways...

Sen's thoughts were interrupted by his colleague Santa Singh bursting into the room. The Sikh was, like the rest of his race, loud and aggressive. "Brother, you think you can run away without giving us a party?" he yelled as he came. "We insist on having a feast to welcome our sister-in-law."

Sen stood up quickly and put his hand across the table to keep the Sikh at arm's length. Santa Singh ignored the proffered hand, came round the table, and enveloped his friend in his arms. He planted his wet and hirsute kisses on the sahib's cheeks.

"Congratulations, brother. When are we to meet our sister-in-law?"

"Soon, very soon," replied Sen, extricating himself from the Sikh's embrace and wiping his cheeks. Before the words were out of his mouth, he knew he had blundered. "As soon as we get back from our honeymoon."

"Honeymoon!" exclaimed Santa Singh, with a leer; he took Sen's hands in his and squeezed them amorously. "I hope you've had yourself massaged with chameleon oil; puts more punch into things. You should also add crushed almonds in your milk. Above all, don't overdo it. Not more than..."

There was no stopping the Sikh from giving unsolicited

advice on how to approach an inexperienced virgin and the proper use of aphrodisiacs. Sen kept smiling politely, without making comment. When he had had enough, he interrupted the Sikh's soliloquy by extending his hand. "It was very kind of you to drop in. We will call on you and Mrs. Singh as soon as we are back in Delhi."

Santa Singh took Sen's hand without any enthusiasm. "Goodbye. Have a nice time." He went out, and Sen sat down with a sigh of relief. He knew he had not been rude. He had behaved with absolute rectitude—exactly like an English gentleman.

A minute later a *chaprassi* raised the thick curtains to let in Mr. Swami, the director of the department. Sen again extended his hand across the table to keep the visitor at arm's length: the natives' desire to make physical contact galled him. "Good morning, sir."

The director touched Sen's hand, but didn't answer the greeting. His mouth was full of betel saliva. He tilted his face up to avoid dribbling and bawled out to the *chaprassi*: "Hey, spittoon *lao*."

The *chaprassi* ran in with the vessel which Sen had ordered removed from his room, and held it under the director's chin. Mr. Swami spat out the bloody phlegm. Sen opened his table drawer and pretended he was looking for his matchbox.

The director sat down and lit his *bidi*. "Eh, you Sen, you are a dark harse. By God, a pitch-black harse, if I may say so." Mr. Swami fancied his knowledge of English idiom. "So quietly you go and get yourself hitched. My steno says, 'Sir, we should celebrate holiday to celebrate sahib's marriage!' I say, 'What marriage, man?' 'Sir, Mr. Sen got married this morning.' 'By God,' I said, 'I must get the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth right from the harse's mouth—the dark harse's mouth.'" The director stretched his hand across the table. "Clever guy, you eh?" he said, with a smirk.

Sen touched the hand of his boss with the tips of his fingers. "Thank you, sir."

"What for thank you? And you come to the office on the day you get married. Heavens won't fall if you stay away a few days. I as your boss order you to go back home to your wife. I will put in a demi-official memo. What do you say to that?"

The director was pleased with himself and extended his hand, which Sen took as an acknowledgment of the witticism. "Thank you, sir. I think I will go home."

"My God, you are a sahib! I hope your wife is not a memsahib. That would be too much of a joke."

The director left, but his betel-stained smirk lingered on like the smile of the Cheshire Cat, and his last remark began to go round and round in Sen's head with an insistent, rhythmic beat. *I hope your wife isn't a memsahib, not a memsahib, not a memsahib. I hope your wife is not a memsahib.*

Would his wife be a memsahib? he mused as he drove back home for lunch. It was not very likely. She claimed to be an MA in English literature. But he had met so many of his countrymen with long strings of Firsts who could barely speak the English language correctly. To start with, there was the director himself with his "okey dokes" and "by gums" who, like other South Indians, pronounced eight as *yate*, egg as *yugg*, and always stumbled on words beginning with *m*. He smiled to himself as he recalled the director instructing his private secretary to get Mr. M. M. Amir, Member of Parliament, on the phone—"I want Yum Yum Yumeer, Yum Pee." The Bengalis had their own execrable accent: they added an airy *h* wherever they could after a *b* or a *w* or an *s*. A virgin sounded like some exotic tropical plant—"the vharjeen"; "will" like *wheel*; and the simple simple like *sheemple*.

There was much crying at the farewell, and the bride continued to sniffle for a long time afterwards in the car. She had drawn her sari down to her eyes and covered the rest of her face with a silk handkerchief into which she blew her nose. When Sen lighted his pipe, she clamped the handkerchief firmly over her nostrils.

"Does the smoke bother you?" was the first sentence he spoke to his wife. She replied by a vigorous shake of the head.

They stopped at a mango orchard by the roadside to have lunch. His mother had made two separate packets with their names in Bengali pinned on them. The one marked *Sunny* had roasted chicken and cheese sandwiches. The other contained boiled rice and pickles in a small brass cup with curried lentils. His wife poured the lentils on the rice and began to eat with her fingers.

They ate without speaking to each other. Within a few minutes they had an audience of anxious passers-by and children from a neighbouring village. Some sat on their haunches; others just stood gaping at the couple or commenting on their being newly-married.

Sen knew how to deal with the rustic. "Are you people hungry?" he asked sarcastically.

The men turned away sheepishly, but the urchins did not budge.

"Buzz off, you dirty bastards," roared Sen, raising his hand as if to strike them. The children ran away to a safe distance and began to yell back at Sen, mimicking his English "Buzz off, buzz off," they cried. "*Arey*, he is a sahib, a big black sahib."

Sen ignored them and spoke politely to his wife. "Pardon the language," he said, with a smile. "Would you like to sample one of my sandwiches? I don't know whether you eat meat. Take the lettuce and cheese; it is fresh cheddar."

Mrs. Sen took the sandwich with her curry-stained fingers. She tore a strip off the toast as if it were a *chapati*, scooped up a mixture of rice, curry, and cheddar, and put it in her mouth. She took one bite and stopped munching. Through her thick glasses she stared at her husband as if he had given her poison. She turned pale and, being unable to control herself any further, spat the food out.

"I am dreadfully sorry," stammered Sen. "The cheddar upset you. I should have known."

Mrs. Sen wiped her lips with the end of her sari and asked for water. She rinsed her mouth and splashed it on her face. The lunch was ruined.

"We better be on our way," said Sen, standing up. "That is, if you feel better."

She tied up her brass cup in a duster and followed him to the car. When they were on the road again, she fished out a silver box from her handbag and extracted a couple of betel leaves. She smeared one with lime and cashew paste, added cardamom and sliced betel nuts, rolled it up, and held it out for her husband.

"I'm afraid I don't touch the stuff," he said apologetically. "I'll stick to my pipe, if you don't mind." Mrs. Sen did not mind. She slipped the leaf in her own mouth and began to chew contentedly.

They got to the resthouse in good time. The resthouse bearer took in the luggage and spread the bedding rolls. He asked Mrs. Sen what they would like for dinner. She referred him to her husband. "Just anything for me," he replied; "*omelette or anything. Ask the memsahib what she would* like for herself. I will take a short walk before dinner."

"Don't go too far, sahib," said the bearer. "This is wild

country. There is a footpath down to the river which the sahibs who come to fish take. It is quite safe."

Sen went into the bedroom to ask his wife if she would like to come out for a walk. She was unpacking her things. He changed his mind. "I'll go for a short stroll towards the river. Get the bearer to put out the Scotch and soda in the veranda; there's a bottle in my suitcase. We'll have a drink before dinner."

His wife nodded her head.

The fishermen's well-beaten footpath snaked its way through a dense foliage of *sal* and flame-of-the-forest, ending abruptly on the pebbly bank of the river. The Ganges was a magnificent sight; a broad and swift-moving current of clear, icy-blue water sparkling in the bright sun. It must have been from places like this one where he stood, he thought, that the sages of olden times had pronounced the Ganges the holiest of all the rivers in the world. He felt a sense of kinship with his Aryan ancestors who worshipped the beautiful in nature, sang hymns to the rising sun, raised goblets of fermented *soma* juice to the full moon, ate beef, and were lusty with full-bosomed and large-hipped women. Much water had flowed down the Ganges since then, and Hinduism was now like the river itself at its lower reaches—as at Calcutta where he was born. At Calcutta, it was a sluggish expanse of slime and sludge carrying the excrement of millions of pilgrims who polluted it at Hardwar, Benares, Allahabad, Patna, and other holy cities on its banks, and who fouled it further by strewing charred corpses for the fish and the turtles to eat. And Hinduism now belonged to the cow-protectors, the prohibitionists—and the chewers of betel leaves. That must be it, he thought cheerfully. His was the pristine Hinduism of the stream that sparkled before him; that of the majority, of the river after it had been sullied by centuries of narrow prejudices. He walked over the pebbled bank, took up a palmful of the icy-cold water, and splashed it on his face.

The shadows of the jungle lengthened across the stream, and the cicadas began to call. Sen turned back and quickly retraced his steps to the bungalow. The sun was setting. It was time for a sundowner.

Tumblers and soda were laid out on the table in the veranda. The bearer heard his footsteps and came with a bunch of keys in his open hand. "I did not like to open the sahib's trunk," he explained. "Please take out the whisky."

"Why didn't you ask the memsahib to take it out?"

The bearer looked down at his feet. "She said she could not touch a bottle of alcohol. She gave me the keys, but I don't like to meddle with sahib's luggage. If things are misplaced . . ."

"That's all right. Open my suitcase. The bottles of whisky and brandy are right on top. And serve dinner as soon as the memsahib is ready."

There was no point in asking his wife to sit with him. He poured himself a large Scotch and lighted his pipe. Once more his thoughts turned to the strange course his life had taken. If he had married one of the English girls he had met in his university days, how different things would have been! They would have kissed a hundred times between the wedding and the wedding night; they would have walked hand in hand through the forest and made love beside the river; they would have lain in each other's arms and sipped their Scotch. They would have nibbled at knick-knacks in between bouts of love; and they would have made love till the early hours of the morning. The whisky warmed his blood and quickened his imagination. He was back in England. The gathering gloom and the dark, tropical forest accentuated his feelings of loneliness. He felt an utter stranger in his own country. He did not hear the bearer announce that dinner was served. Now his wife came out and asked in her quaint Bengali accent, "Do you want to sheet outsheede?"

"What?" he asked gruffly, waking up from his reverie.

"Do you want to sheet insheede or outsheede? The deener ees on the table."

"Oh, I'll be right in. You go ahead. I'll join you in a second." Good lord! What would his English friends have said if she had invited them in this manner! The ambiguous invitation was Mrs. Sen's first communication with her husband.

A strong, sweet smell of coconut oil and roses assailed Sen's nostrils as he entered the dining room. His wife had washed and oiled her hair; it hung in loose, snaky coils below her waist. The parting was daubed with bright vermilion powder to indicate her status as a married woman. He had no doubt that she had smeared her body with attar of roses as her mother had probably instructed. She sat patiently at the table; being a Hindu woman, she could not very well start eating before her husband.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. You should have started. Your dinner must be cold."

She simply wagged her head.

They began to eat: he, his omelette and buttered slice of

bread, with his fork and knife; she, her rice and lentil curry mushed in between the fingers and palm of her right hand. Sen cleared his throat many times to start a conversation. But each time the vacant and bewildered look behind the thick lenses of his wife's glasses made him feel that words would fail to convey their meaning. If his friends knew, they would certainly have a big laugh. "Oh Sunny Sen! How could he start talking to his wife? He hadn't been properly introduced. Don't you know he is an Englishman?"

The dinner was eaten in silence. Kalyani Sen emitted a soft belch and took out her betel-leaf case. She rolled a leaf, paused for a split second, and then put it in her mouth. Sunny had promised himself the luxury of expensive Havana cigars over his honeymoon. He took one out of its phallic metal case, punctured it with a gold clipper, and lighted it. The aromatic smoke soon filled the dining room. This time his wife did not draw the fold of her sari across her face; she simply clasped her hands in front of her mouth and discreetly blocked her nostrils with the back of her hands.

They sat in silence facing each other across the table; she, chewing her leaf—almost like a cow chewing the cud, thought Sen—he, lost in the smoke of his long Cuban cigar. It was oppressive and the barrier between them impassable.

Sen glanced at his watch and stood up. "News," he exclaimed loudly. "Mustn't miss the news." He went into the bedroom to fetch his transistor radio set.

Two beds had been laid side by side with no space between them; the pillows almost hugged each other. The sheets had been sprinkled with the earthy perfume of *khas* fibre and looked as if they also awaited the consummation of the marriage performed earlier in the day. How, wondered Sen, could she think of this sort of thing when (they hadn't even been introduced! No, hell!) barely a civil word had passed between them? He quickly took out his radio set and hurried back to the dining room.

He tuned into Delhi. While he listened to the news, the bearer cleared the table and left, salaaming, "Goodnight, sir." Mrs. Sen got up, collected her betel-leaf case, and disappeared into the bedroom.

Fifteen minutes of news was followed by a commentary on sport which Sen had never bothered to listen to before. He was glad he did this time, for the commentary was followed by the announcement of a change in programmes. A concert of vocal Hindustani music by Ustad Badey Ghulam

Ali Khan had been put off to relay a performance by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra from New Delhi. Ghulam Ali Khan was the biggest name in Indian music, and even the Anglicised natives had to pretend that they admired the cacophony of gargling sounds he produced from the pit of his stomach. Members of the diplomatic corps were known to sit through four hours of the maestro's performances lest they offend their Indian hosts or be found less cultured than staffs of rival embassies. The Czech Philharmonic had come to India for the first time. Pity he wasn't in town, thought Sen; he could have invited the right people for dinner (tails of course), followed by the concert. How would his wife have fitted into a party of this sort?

The sound of applause came over the air, followed by an announcement that the opening piece was a selection from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. Sen was transported back to the glorious evenings at Covent Garden and the Festival Hall. Smetana was followed by Bartok. The only thing that broke the enchantment was the applause between the movements. How could one expect the poor, benighted natives to know that the end of a movement was not the end of the symphony!

There was an interval of ten minutes. The last piece was Sen's favourite—Dvorak's Symphony No. 5 in E minor. He poured himself a liqueur brandy, drew up a chair, and stretched his legs on it. He had never heard Dvorak as well performed, even in Europe. A Cuban cigar, an excellent cognac, and the world's greatest music: what more could one ask for! He gently decapitated the cigar of its ashy head, lay back in the armchair, and closed his eyes in complete rapture. By the final movement he was fast asleep, with the cigar slowly burning itself out between his lips.

Neither the applause at the end of the concert nor the silence and the crackling of the radio woke Sen from his slumber. When the cigar got too hot, he opened his mouth and let it drop on his lap. It slowly burnt through his trousers and then singed the hair on his underbelly. He woke with a start and threw the butt on the ground.

Although the cigar had only burnt a tiny hole near a fly button, the room was full of the smell of burning cloth. That was a narrow escape, thought Sen. He switched off the transistor and glanced at his watch. It was well after midnight. He blew out the oil lamp and went to the bedroom.

A lamp still burnt on the table. His wife had fallen asleep

—obviously after having waited for him. She had not changed or taken off her jewellery. She had put mascara around her eyes. Her tears had washed some of it on to her cheeks, and the pillow had a smudge of soot.

Sen put on pyjamas and slipped into his bed. He stared at his wife's gently heaving bosom and her open mouth. How could he? In any case, he didn't have the slightest desire. He turned the knob on the lamp. The yellow flame sank to a blue fluting on the edge of the wick, sputtered twice, then gave up the struggle and plunged the room into black solitude.

The bearer came in with the tea tray and woke him up. "Sahib, it is after nine o'clock. Memsahib has been up for the last four or five hours. She has had her bath, said her prayer, and has been waiting for you to get up to have her *chota-hazri*."

Sen rubbed his eyes. The sun was streaming across the veranda into the room. His wife had made a swiss roll of her bedding and put it away on top of her steel trunk. "I'll have my tea in the veranda," he replied, getting up. He went into the bedroom, splashed cold water on his face, and went out.

"Sorry to keep you waiting; I seem to do it all the time. You should really never wait for me." He stretched himself and yawned. "I am always . . . What on earth!"

His wife had got up and now, while his face was still lifted towards the ceiling, she bent over to touch his feet. He was her husband, lord, and master. He looked down in alarm. She looked up, tears streaming down both her cheeks. "I am unworthy," she said, half-questioning, half-stating her fears. And, before he could reply, she drew the flap of her sari across her eyes and fled inside.

"What the hell is all this?" muttered Sen, and collapsed into an armchair. But he knew perfectly well what she meant. He sat a long while scratching his head, his eyes fixed in a hypnotic stare on the sunlit lawn. He had no desire to go in and make up to his wife.

The bearer came, looked accusingly at the untouched tray of tea, and announced that breakfast was on the table. Sen got up reluctantly. She would obviously not have anything to eat unless he cajoled her. And he was damned if he was going to do it. Again, he was wrong. She was at the table. He avoided looking at her.

"Tea?" he asked, and filled her cup and then his own.

Once again they ate their different foods in their different ways without saying a word to each other. And, as soon as the meal was over, she went to her betel leaves and he to his pipe. She retired to the bedroom. He took his transistor and returned to the veranda to listen to the morning news.

The arrival of the postman at noon put the idea in his head, although the only mail was a copy of the office memorandum sanctioning his fortnight's leave. He walked in waving the yellow envelope bearing the legend *On India Government Service Only*.

"I am afraid we have to return at once. It's an urgent letter from the Minister. He has to answer some questions in Parliament dealing with our department. I'll get the bearer to help you pack while I give the car a checkup. Bearer, bearer!" he yelled as he went out.

Half an hour later they were on the road to Delhi; a little before sunset, Sen drove under his portico. The son and mother embraced each other and only broke apart when the bride knelt to touch her mother-in-law's feet. "God bless you, my child," said the older woman, touching the girl on the shoulder, "but what . . ."

Her son pulled out the yellow envelope from his pocket and waved it triumphantly. "An urgent summons from the Minister. These chaps don't respect anyone's private life. I simply had to come."

"Of course," replied his mother, wiping away a tear. She turned to her daughter-in-law. "Your parents will be delighted to know you are back. Why don't you ring them up?" A few minutes later, Mrs. Sen's parents drove up in a taxi. There were more tears at the reunion, more explanations about the letter from the Minister. There was also relief. Now that the bride had spent a night with her husband and consummated the marriage, she could return to her parental home for a few days.

Sen spent the next morning going round the local bookshops and coffee houses. The weekend followed. On Sunday morning, when his mother was at prayer, he rang up the director at his home to explain his return and ask permission to resume work. "My mother has been in indifferent health and I did not want to leave her alone for too long." He knew this line of approach would win both sympathy and approval.

The director expressed concern and spoke warmly of a Hindu son's sacred duty towards his widowed mother.

"And we must celebrate your wedding and meet your wife... as soon as your mother is better."

"Yes, sir. As soon as she is up to the mark, we will invite you over."

The mother being "a bit under the weather" and "not quite up to the mark" became Sen's explanation for cancelling his leave and not having a party. It even silenced Santa Singh, who had planned a lot of ribaldry at Sen's expense.

Days went by—and then weeks. Kalyani came over with her mother a couple of times to fetch her things. She came when her husband was in the office and only met her mother-in-law. It was conveyed to Sunny Sen that, in the circumstances, it was for the husband to go and fetch his wife from her home. Sen put off doing so for some time—and then had to go away on a tour of inspection to Southern India.

It was a fortnight after his return that his parents-in-law learned that he was back in town. The relations between the two families became very strained. Nothing was said directly, but talk about the Sens being dowry-seekers and Sen's mother being a difficult woman started going round. Then Sunny got a letter from his father-in-law. It was polite but distinctly cold. From the contents it was obvious that it had been drafted and written on the advice of a lawyer, with a carbon copy made for use if necessary. It referred to the advertisement in the matrimonial columns and the negotiations preceding the marriage, the money given on betrothal and in the dowry, the wedding and its consummation in the forest resthouse of the Ganges. Sen was asked to state his intentions.

For the first time, Sen realised how serious the situation had become. He turned to his mother. A new bond was forged between them. "It is a matter of great shame," his mother said firmly. "We must not let this business go too far. You must fetch her. I will go away to my brother at Dehra Dun for a few days."

"No, Ma, I will not have anyone making insinuations against you," he replied and pleaded, "in any case, you must not leave me."

"No-one has made any insinuations, and I am not leaving you. This will always be my home; where else can I live except with my own flesh and blood? But you must get your wife. Let her take over the running of the house and become its mistress as is her right. Then I will come back and live without worrying my head with servants and cooking and shopping."

Sen flopped back in his chair like one exhausted. His mother came over behind him and took his head between her hands. "Don't let it worry you too much. I will write to my brother to come and fetch me. He will go to your father-in-law's and bring over your wife. Before we leave, I will show her everything, give her the keys, and tell the servants to take orders from her. When you come back from the office you will find everything running smoothly." She kissed her son's hair. "And do be nice to her. She is only a child. You know how much I am looking forward to having a grandson to fondle in my lap."

Sen found the whole thing very distasteful. He felt angry with himself for allowing things to come to such a pass. And he felt angrier with his wife for humiliating his mother and driving her out of her home. He would have nothing to do with her unless she accepted his mother. He instructed his cook-bearer about the arrangements of the bedrooms. If the new mistress asked any questions, he was to say that those were his master's orders.

On Monday, when the bearer brought his morning tea, Sen told him not to expect him for lunch and to tell his wife not to wait for him for dinner as he might be working late in the office. He had breakfast with his mother and uncle. He promised to write to his mother every day to tell her how things were going. "You must try to understand her points of view," admonished his mother. "She has been brought up in a different world. But love and patience conquer all."

Sen was the last to leave his office. He drove straight to the Gymkhana Club. For an hour he sat by the bathing pool drinking ice-cold lager and watching the bathers. There were European women from the diplomatic corps with their children; there were pretty Punjabi girls in their pony tails and bikinis; there were swarthy young college students showing off their muscular torsos as they leapt from the diving board. This surely was where he belonged—where the East and West met in a sort of minestrone soup of human limbs of many pigments: black, brown, pink, white. Why couldn't he have married one of these girls, taught her proper English instead of the Americanised chi-chi which they thought was smart talk?

The bathers went home. Sen got up with a sigh and went to the bar. He was greeted by several old friends. "Hoi, Sunny, you old bastard. What's this one hears about you?"

Sunny smiled. "I don't have to proclaim everything I do from the housetops, do I?"

"Like hell you don't. You stand drinks or we'll debag you and throw you out in front of all the women." Three of them advanced towards him.

"Lay off, chaps. Bearer, give 'em what they want. What's the poison?"

They sat on the high stools and downed their drinks with, "Cheers," "Here's mud in your eye," and "Bottoms up."

"Where's your wife?" asked one. "Don't tell me you're going to keep her in the seclusion of the *purdah* like a native!"

"No ruddy fear," answered Sen. "She's gone to her mother's. Would you chaps like another?"

One round followed another till it was time for the bar to close. A friend invited him home for dinner. Sen accepted without a murmur.

It was almost one o'clock when Sen drove back to his house. He was well-fortified with Scotch to gloss over any awkwardness. He switched on the light in the hall and saw trunks piled up against the wall. His wife had obviously come back. There was no light in her bedroom. She must have gone to sleep many hours earlier. He switched off the hall light, tiptoed to his bedroom, switched on the table lamp, went back and bolted the door from the inside.

The bearer's persistent knocking woke him up. His head rocked as he got up to unfasten the bolt. What would the bearer think of the sahib bolting his door against his wife? He couldn't care less. The throbbing in his head demanded all his attention.

"Shall I take tea for the memsahib?" the bearer asked.

"She does not have bed-tea," replied Sen. "Isn't she up yet?"

"I don't know, sahib; she has also bolted her door from the inside."

Sen felt uneasy. He swallowed a couple of aspirins and gulped down a cup of strong tea. He lay back on his pillow to let the aspirin take effect. His imagination began to run away with him. She couldn't. No, of course not! Must have waited for him till midnight, got scared of being alone, bolted the door, and was sleeping late. But he had been nasty to her and she might be over-sensitive.

He got up and knocked at her door. There was no response.

He went to the bathroom and then he tried her door again.

There was no sound from inside. He left the house and went around to her window and pressed it with both hands. The two sides flew apart and crashed against the wall. Even that noise did not wake her. He peered in and caught the gleam of her glasses on her nose.

With a loud cry, Sen ran back into the house and called for the bearer. Master and servant put their shoulders to the door and battered against it. The bolt gave way and they burst into the room. The woman on the bed didn't stir. A white fluid trickled from her gaping mouth to the pillow. Her eyes stared fixedly through the thick glasses. Sen put his hand on her forehead. It was the first time he had touched his wife. And she was dead.

On the table beside her bed were an empty tumbler and two envelopes. One bore her mother's name in Bengali; the other was for him.

A haunted smile came on his lips as he read the English address: *To Mr. S. Sen, Esq.*

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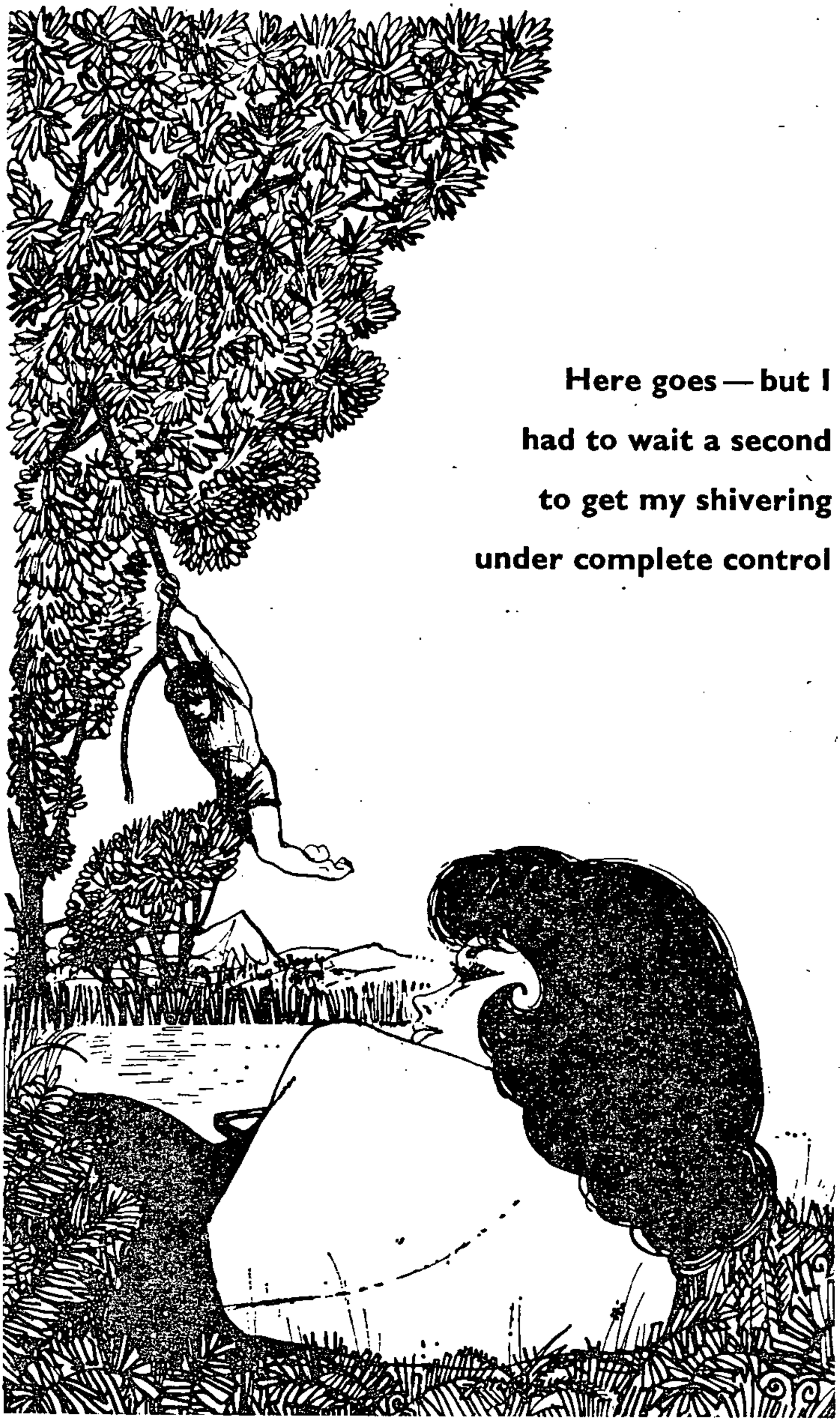
SUMMARY OF SUMMER

The very height of summer bliss,
To me at least, I'd say is this:
To lounge about for hour on hour
Within a leafy, fruit-filled bower
And read a book or let it lie
Beneath a sleepy, half-closed eye,
And slowly sip a cooling drink
And listen to the clink-a-clink
Of ice, and bite a juicy peach
And stretch as far as I can reach
And hear the rustle of the trees
And murmur of the busy bees
And smell the perfume of a rose
And wriggle carefree, shoeless toes
And scratch an itch and yawn a yawn
And watch while someone mows the lawn.

RICHARD ARMOUR,
Nights With Armour



Here goes — but I had to wait a second to get my shivering under complete control

Goodnight, Young Man

by WALLACE REYBURN

MY FAMILY had a summer cottage in the Waitakeres, the range of mountains on the outskirts of Auckland. The Waitakeres in those days were very much virgin bush. Here and there areas had been cleared to provide farmland, but for the most part it was densely-packed trees, shrubs and ferns.

Some tracts had been marked off for development. A road would be cut in from the highway and the land on each side pegged out in sections for sale as summer places to city dwellers such as we were.

My father and several of his friends had bought some of these sections and, working on a communal basis at weekends and at holiday time, each had at length hacked a clearing out of his piece of bush and built a cottage on it. We kids had willingly joined in the work. It was not the easy-going sort of time we spent holidaying at the beach but it did have a certain sense of excitement. We felt like pioneers.

In front of our cottage, a strictly utility affair with one big room and several bedrooms; was a *patio* with a large water tank nearby and facilities for cooking out-of-doors. Where the pipe led off from the corrugated iron roof to the tank was a filter, packed with fern fronds and bracken to give the water some sort of flavour. There is nothing quite so flat to drink as pure rainwater. We cooked over logs of the *manuka* tree, sap oozing from the ends of the logs as the wood burnt and

giving out the most pleasantly pungent odour. Food eaten at the cottage always tasted just that much better than in town.

Our cottage was large enough for us to invite friends to stay and one weekend my parents asked the Davenports to come up.

We didn't know the Davenports particularly well. In fact I had never met them. Mr. Davenport had become one of my father's dental patients and they had struck up a friendship.

Mr. Davenport was not an Aucklander. He was from Wellington. He worked for the Government and had been for some time in England, at the New Zealand High Commissioner's office in London. When he was transferred back to New Zealand he had been given a post in Auckland and therefore he and his wife didn't know many people in the city. It was a friendly gesture on my father's part to invite the couple to our place in the Waitakeres.

We had gone up there on the Friday evening and the Davenports drove up on Saturday morning.

I didn't much take to Mr. Davenport. As the weekend progressed it struck me that he talked too much. He seemed such a know-it-all. But in truth he was probably quite a decent fellow. My opinion of him was distorted, for a reason which will become apparent.

Mrs. Davenport—that was a different matter altogether. I was completely bowled over by her the moment she got out of their car. I was supposed to be sawing logs for the fire when my parents greeted them, and I halted in mid-swing with the saw at the very sight of her.

She was English—Mr. Davenport having married her during his tour of duty in England. I have no doubt that she would have been considered very sophisticated even by London standards. But to me, a callow New Zealand youth, she was the most glamorous thing I had ever encountered in that unsophisticated part of the world. She might well have stepped from the pages of the *Tatler*, to which my father subscribed for his waiting room. She could have been one of the worldly young women in those pictures of a hunt ball or a fashionable first night, and doubtless she had been.

I was soon to learn that although she had been living in New Zealand for almost a year now, she had made few concessions to the different way of life. Her clothes, for instance, would have been appropriate enough for a country weekend in England but they were hardly in keeping with the clothes of New Zealanders when they go into the bush.

"A big boy for sixteen," she remarked when I was introduced to them, giving a most attractive smile as she said it.

"He's considered the best line-out forward in the Auckland Grammar rugger team," my father said proudly.

"At sixteen!" said Mr. Davenport. "Well, what do you know about that!"

When they were being shown around the section, Mrs. Davenport was fascinated by the bush. English people always are, because there is nothing familiar there. None of the oaks, elms and birches they have in their woods at home. All the trees in the New Zealand bush are trees they have never seen before in their lives. Things like the giant *kauri* tree, which oozes great lumps of golden coloured gum that plop down on to the ground and snare a passing beetle or some such insect, and when the gum hardens you polish it up and use it as a paperweight: the *manuka*, the *rata* and the lofty *nikau* palms. And the Silver Fern, with long broad fronds that are green on top and then when they are disturbed by the wind you see that the under part of each frond is brilliant silver, as though they had been sprayed with metallic paint.

"The bush is the one thing that New Zealand has of its very own," said Mrs. Davenport, as though she didn't place much stock by our cities—which wasn't surprising when you've been used to living in London.

At the bottom of our section was a creek and in the afternoon we all went there for a swim. We had dammed it with boulders and with sandbags filled with silt and, although this wasn't altogether watertight, it did provide a swimming pool deep enough to dive into from either bank. The branches of the big trees on each side met overhead and it made an attractive sort of grotto down there, shaded, away from the glare of the sun.

Most of the trees by the water's edge were what the Maoris call *pohutákawa* and what we called Christmas trees. Not because you could cut them down and set them up in your living room at Christmas time—they were far too big for that. We called them Christmas trees because that was the time of year when they burst into bloom, covering themselves with great purple blossoms.

From an upper branch of one of these trees hung a rope, and holding on to it you could swing out across the pool, Tarzan-like, to land on the opposite bank or let go halfway

over and splash into the water. It was a favourite pastime of mine. Mr. Davenport thought it was "great stuff," and he had a go himself.

Mrs. Davenport watched as I swung out over the pool and, for a variation, circled round to finish back at the base of the tree.

"Why don't you try it?" my father said to her.

"Good heavens, no," she laughed. "I could never do that."

As the others, thankful to be out of the heat of the day, idled in the pool, she kept watching me. Each time I was about to take off I would notice her down there in the water looking up at me. It made me feel a little self-conscious. Perhaps I was showing off a bit. Perhaps not—otherwise she wouldn't have watched me so intently.

After our swim we went back to the clearing and my father got out some beer for himself and my mother and Mr. Davenport. Mrs. Davenport didn't drink. She made up for it with her smoking. She never seemed to be without a cigarette. Now as she lay sunbathing on a steamer rug on the ground she would light up another cigarette almost immediately after she had finished the previous one. It appeared to be from nerves rather than for any real enjoyment she got from smoking.

She was wearing a bathing suit of the type popular with women at that time—a one-piece suit with what was called "the suntan back," in other words practically no back at all, suspended precariously by two narrow shoulder straps. It was a vogue that was fortunate for her, since she had a beautiful back. I was admiring it, as unobtrusively as possible, when she did something which abruptly heightened my interest.

She was lying on her stomach on the rug and she slid the shoulder strap off each shoulder to make the most of the sun on her back. Leaning on her elbows, looking thoughtfully into the bush through the smoke that curled up from her cigarette, she probably wasn't aware that I could see more than just her back.

I glanced around at the three behind me. They seemed to be unconcernedly busy with their beer and chatter. But I couldn't be sure. I got into quite an agitated state. I wanted to take in to the full what was more than merely a suggestion of Mrs. Davenport's lovely figure but I didn't want them to notice me doing so.

At length I could stand it no longer. I went into the cottage, on the pretext of getting some homework I was supposed to be doing over the weekend. I went to a window where I could see her. I chose the window with care. It was one from which I could see her and yet be out of sight from the others. Her head was turned away from me, so I could look at her quite unhampered.

But shortly she moved her position and happened to glance up at the cottage. I was caught unawares. I had no time to step away from the window. She saw me there. Or perhaps she didn't see me. Sunshine glaring on the glass can make it impossible to see through into the relative gloom inside. But she did look at the window for a moment or so, with me standing frozen there, not wishing to dart away now and appear furtive. Her face showed no sign that she could see me. Casually she turned away, to take up a fresh cigarette and resume her quiet contemplation of the bush.

I left the window, got my books and then, rather shamefacedly, returned to the clearing. She looked around at me but gave no indication that there was anything amiss.

"What are you reading?" she asked, raising herself to turn and sit cross-legged facing the sun.

"History. It's some homework I have to do."

"Homework. Poor you."

She gave me a warm smile. She had wonderful teeth. I was so glad that it was her husband and not she who was a patient of my father. The thought of her having dental work in his surgery would have detracted so much. There is nothing quite so unromantic as dentistry. For instance, in the whole history of literature which author has ever made a dentist the hero of a novel?

It wasn't easy to keep my mind on my books. She seemed interested in talking to me. But that was not the chief distraction. Her trim body, there in the yellow bathing suit right in front of me, had much more urgency than *The Wars of the Roses*. I had done nothing more than read and reread a couple of paragraphs before the sun was gone and it was time for us to change for the evening meal.

After dinner my father produced a bottle of whisky and a siphon of soda and we sat out on the *patio*, since it was too close indoors. As the others sipped their drinks, Mrs. Davenport and I were somewhat out of things, since she was a non-drinker, and my drinking was restricted to the odd

bottle of beer which my father kindly bestowed upon me as part of the initiation into grown-up ways. Certainly I wasn't on spirits yet.

My mother, conscious of our thus being rather apart from them, said, "Perhaps Helen would like to see the glow-worms."

"You've got some here?" said Mr. Davenport.

"Down at the creek," said my father. "Quite a little colony of them."

Glow-worms, of course, were no novelty to Mr. Davenport, or to any other New Zealander, but Mrs. Davenport had never seen any.

My mother turned to me. "Perhaps you'd take Mrs. Davenport down to the creek and show her."

Promptly I got a torch and we went down the path to the swimming pool. The glow-worms were a short distance up the creek from the pool and the path leading to them was rather more overgrown than that which led from the cottage. It was necessary to brush aside branches of the trees and long fern fronds that stretched out to bar the way. Easy enough in daylight, but a bit tricky at night.

"I'd best hold on to you," Mrs. Davenport said, taking my hand as I went in front with the torch.

The contact of her hand was exciting. I hoped mine wasn't clammy. I would have liked to have had advance warning of this, like at school dances when you can give your hands a good dry-out on your handkerchief before taking a girl on to the floor.

She stumbled a couple of times over roots sticking up from the ground and tightened her grip on my hand to support herself. Whether she knew it or not, I found this electrifying.

"There you are," I said, when we got to the spot where the glow-worms operated.

"Isn't that lovely!" she exclaimed.

The glow-worms—they're a form of beetle, actually—were in the opposite bank of the creek, hundreds of them scurrying around busily, the females making themselves more attractive to the males by giving out a bluish-white light.

"If you half-close your eyes," she said, "it's like looking at thousands of stars twinkling in the sky."

She stood there beside me, entranced. The interesting thing about looking at a colony of glow-worms is that it's like looking at a beautiful waterfall—it's doing the same thing all the time but you can't stop looking at it, fascinated.

She was obviously thrilled at the sight of this new, to her, display because she stood there for some time. For my part I was keen to get on with the return journey through the undergrowth. She would probably hold my hand again.

When at length we turned to go back I may have been imagining it, but she seemed eager to take my hand once more and there seemed to be something different about the way she held it. But perhaps it was just imagination, because when we got on to the main path and the going was easier she kept hold of my hand for a little while and then released it.

I was told it was my bedtime when we got back. The Renshaws, our friends on the next section, were driving up from town and there was an invitation for a nightcap with them when they arrived, which let me out since the Renshaws had no children and there was nothing there for me.

But I was in no hurry to go to bed. I didn't mind at all just sitting on the *patio* and taking sidelong glances at Mrs. Davenport and remembering how exciting it was feeling her hand in mine.

More than once, when I looked around at her our eyes met and she smiled at me. Merely because we were fellow non-drinkers and therefore had something in common? Or was there something more meaningful in her smile? How do you know about these things, at sixteen?

However, I did eventually have to say my goodnights and go to bed. But not to sleep.

I lay there, my door ajar, listening to them talking, until there was the sound of a car coming up the gravel road. The Renshaws. Well, that was that.

But I was excitedly surprised when I overheard what Mrs. Davenport was saying. She was tired. It was probably all the fresh air. Would it be terribly rude of her if she didn't go over to the Renshaws with them?

I listened, holding my breath, for the verdict. Certainly she could go off to bed if she felt like it. They'd just be sitting around having drinks, anyway, and that wouldn't be much fun for her. She could meet the Renshaws in the morning.

I heard my parents and Mr. Davenport taking off.

"Goodnight, Helen. The lamp's on in your room, just turn it up when you go in. Sleep well."

Then all was quiet.

All tensed up I waited, but there was no sign of her coming along to the Davenports' room, which was opposite mine.

She seemed to be in the big room, perhaps looking at one of the magazines which we always kept for a while before they were put in my father's waiting room.

Then I heard her coming along the corridor. The light from the big, ornate oil lamp in the main room shone through my open doorway and I gave a little start when her shadow appeared on the wall.

She paused outside my room. No good now closing my eyes and pretending I was asleep because she had seen me.

"Not asleep yet?" she said.

"No."

She came in and stood looking down at me.

"Perhaps we made too much noise with our talking and you couldn't get to sleep."

"It wasn't that. It's sort of hot tonight."

She still stood looking at me. Then she reached out her hand and gently pushed the hair aside from my forehead.

"Goodnight, young man," she said and leaned down and kissed me on the cheek.

The touch of her warm, soft lips sent a tremor through me. There was the subtle smell of perfume.

She was standing upright again and she paused for a moment, her eyes still on me. Then she turned and went out.

I had muffed it.

Naturally she had been hesitant about giving me anything more than a token kiss on the cheek. She was not to know what my reaction would have been if she had kissed me on the lips. For all she knew I would have mentioned it to my parents and it would have been embarrassing. So she had made the initial gesture and it had been up to me to take it from there. And I had muffed it.

I cursed myself for being a fool. Another opportunity would not arise. They were leaving to go back to town next day.

But perhaps it wasn't too late, even now. I could hear the undressing sounds coming from her room. The swish of clothes being taken off, the creaking of the boards underfoot as she moved about. I visualised each garment coming off, the moment of her nakedness before she got into her night-dress. I could hardly control my trembling as I lay there in my bed.

I waited for the unmistakable sounds of the big brass bed as she got into it. It was a noisy old affair, no longer worthy

of a place in our home but was " good enough for the cottage."

I heard none of its numerous sound effects now. Instead I heard a match being struck. She was having a cigarette. A last smoke as she thought over the events of the day? Or waiting for me to show some sort of initiative?

I heard the cane chair in her room. It was by the window. She had seated herself there—to look out across the clearing to the night sky above the trees beyond?

Damn it, what sort of pretext could I think up for going over to her room? Something that would leave me a loophole, just in case I found myself standing at her doorway in my pyjamas and it wasn't what she expected. " Have you got everything you want?" That didn't sound too good. " What time do you want us to wake you in the morning?" That was a bit weak.

But surely I didn't need any covering excuse. She had lit another cigarette.

How would Ramon Novarro have handled this situation? He was the one for this sort of thing. He would have been over there like a shot. Even in his younger days.

I strained my ears to interpret every sound from across the corridor, but there was nothing to indicate that she had got into bed, only the customary objections of the old cane chair to anybody lodging in it.

So intent was I on visualising her sitting there at the window in her nightdress that I was startled when I heard, from among the trees nearby, the *more-pork, more-pork* of the hoot owl which New Zealanders logically enough call the More-Pork. Across there in her room she probably wondered what it was.

But still it was clear that she was not yet going to bed. I made my decision.

Slowly I got up and tiptoed to my door. I could see the crack of light under her doorway from the oil lamp on the wall of the room. Here goes. I waited for a second to get my shivering under control and then stepped into the corridor.

Suddenly I heard voices in the distance. Faint at first, then more distinct as they got nearer. The others were coming back from the Renshaws. I did a hop-step-and-a-jump back into bed.

How long I must have been lying there debating whether or not to make the move! An hour or more.

Time flies when your mind is fully occupied. Mine had been working overtime.

Eventually—another hour or so more?—I managed to get to sleep.

Next morning my hopes were raised when my parents suggested to the Davenports that they stay on until Monday morning, when they could leave in time for Mr. Davenport to get to work. I could offer to take Mrs. Davenport to what we called the Vantage Point, back through the bush to some high ground where there was a wonderful view. And on the way, or coming back, I could make amends for my *gaucherie*. But no, they had to get back to town.

I watched them drive off, feeling low, despite the farewell smile Mrs. Davenport gave me as their car got under way.

Back at the cottage I was put to work cutting away the undergrowth around the clearing, and as my parents sat on the *patio* talking I didn't know if they were aware that I was listening. Not that it mattered to them.

"They really are going to split up?" my father said.

"Apparently so."

"It seems a pity."

"I had a talk with her. Their marriage hasn't worked out."

"Why not?"

"She doesn't really like it here in New Zealand. It was all right when they were in London. She had her friends and all the things she liked to do."

My father nodded. "The gay life. She's a pretty worldly type."

"Actually I don't think she is. Really I think she's just a simple soul at heart. I think she would love to be domesticated. She loves kids. If they'd had kids it would have been different."

"Well, why don't they have children?"

"They can't."

"How do you know?" There was a pause and then my father said, "Oh, you women. You probably discussed all that."

"She'd have liked nothing better than looking after her kids and tucking them into bed at night. That would have given her something to occupy her mind, instead of sitting around worrying whether or not she likes life here."

"Perhaps so.'

"She took a great shine to that son of ours, incidentally."

"Oh?"

"Yes. 'A wonderful boy,' she said. 'If only I had a son like that.'"

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READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?

On top of your reading list — or buried beneath it? Either way, see how many book marks you can get

1. Axel Munthe wrote an international bestseller—what was its title?

2. Give the Christian names of the Wilson who wrote *The Outsider.*

3. Pair the "heroines" below with the books they appear in:
   (a) Becky Sharp. (b) Elizabeth-Jane Newson.
   (c) Anne Elliott. (d) *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*
   (e) *Vanity Fair.* (f) *Persuasion.*

4. Which of these men of letters also had medical training?
   (a) John Keats. (b) A. J. Cronin. (c) Tobias Smollett.

5. Who was the author of *The Heart of the Matter*?

6. In Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest,* Jack Worthing loves Gwendolen Fairfax and Algernon Moncrieff loves Cecily Cardew—true or false?

7. The main female character in Somerset Maugham's story, *Rain,* is:
   (a) Sadie. (b) Sophie. (c) Sally.

8. Where does the action of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* take place?

9. From which Shakespearean play does this quotation come?

   "... the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
   And shining morning face, creeping like snail
   Unwillingly to school"

10. What was the name of Scarlett O'Hara's first husband in *Gone With the Wind?*

11. In which of Charles Dickens' novels does Daniel Quilp appear?

12. Name the author of *Fanny Hill.*

To see how you've got on, turn to page 90.

MOTHER WAS A BUSINESS WOMAN

by LEONE STEWART

THE day the workhouse man came, Mother made her decision.

Outside the parlour door we three boys had crowded; I claiming the keyhole, so that I'd see all that was going on, and Josh and Arnold with their ears pressed to the wood.

Mr. Frogmorton was walking round the lino as if he meant to wear it out and my mother was seated on the edge of the yellow-covered armchair, with her hands in her lap.

She wore a long black skirt and a high-necked black blouse and her brown hair was piled on the top of her head and held there with circular tortoiseshell combs.

Arnold was trying to nudge me out of the way to get the keyhole but I held my ground, determined to miss nothing.

"As I see it, Mrs. Grace," the workhouse man was saying, stroking his curled moustache, "you really have no choice. A widow cannot maintain five children on her own and you have no means, you have just told me. I understand you have received compensation from the Foundry?"

"Ten pounds," Mother said.

"Ah, yes. Well, you will have to bring that with you when you come to the institution and any valuables you may possess. We will see to the selling of the furniture, though I doubt—" and he paused, staring about him at the room—"whether we shall raise more than two or three pounds on that. What have you got upstairs?"

"Beds," Mother said, "and one wash stand."

Mr. Frogmorton nodded, as if he hadn't expected more, so could hardly be disappointed. "Any jewellery?"

"My wedding ring."

He picked up his bowler hat from the small table where the aspidistra stood.

"Very well, Mrs. Grace, we shall expect you and the family when you are ready and—" he coughed discreetly—"you will see that the compensation money is intact."

Josh, Arnold and I fled down the passage to the kitchen to avoid detection now that the visit was over.

Arnold, who was only six, said, "What's the workhouse?"

Josh, at eleven, considered himself the man of the house and bossed the two of us with cuffs when we didn't do his bidding. Now he kicked out at the rickety table with his boot. It didn't matter. Soon it would be ours no longer; soon the bits and pieces that made up our home would be taken away on a cart and auctioned in the church hall.

Josh and I knew all about it. We had often watched the spectacle through the hall window as pathetic, well-worn chairs, rolls of lino and cracked water jugs, came under the hammer. The last possessions, we knew, of families torn apart by poverty or bereavement.

Mr. Frogmorton had been the second visitor to our terrace house that day. First had come unctuous, bald-headed Mr. Bunyon from the Foundry, dry-washing his hands, pointing out that the works were not liable and that the accident that had killed my father had been his own fault and my mother would never find a witness to say otherwise.

She understood that too well. Who would dare tell the truth when it would mean the sack if they did?

Bunyon had stayed ten minutes and all the while saying how generous and understanding the managers were being—ten sovereigns compensation they were offering and that was most handsome when you came to consider it.

My mother had not spoken; instead she had sat and listened to the greasy-suited little man talk in an oily, teeth-whistling voice.

She had accepted the ten gold sovereigns and shown Bunyon out, still silent, still tall and dignified and untearful.

Now, upstairs, Lily was trying to soothe our six-months-old sister, Ann, to sleep, and we boys waited for Mother to come and tell us about Frogmorton.

But she went back into the parlour and I had the idea it was to look at my father's photograph. I think it gave her strength, for often, since he had been killed, she would stand gazing at it.

"It's the workhouse, then," Josh grunted. "They say it's worse than a prison and the master whips the kids if they don't do as he says."

Arnold burst into tears at the very thought and Josh cuffed him round the ears, saying, "You'll get worse than

that from the workhouse manager, so you can stop your snivelling."

I felt sorry for young Arnold. He had been Mother's pet until the baby had come; now he was bruised and forsaken, with nothing but the workhouse hanging over him.

I took no part in the conversation but walked out into our garden. It was narrow, hemmed in on either side by the neighbours' fences.

There was a square of patched grass and, beyond, the cabbages that my father had planted. I didn't want to think of him because already he was so shadowy in my mind, as if he'd been gone from us not six days but six years; or worse than that, had never been at all. I felt disloyal because I couldn't summon up his face before me and had I been asked to describe him I would have been unable to do so.

This was the summer of 1912 and times were hard. The one place that was really overcrowded was the workhouse, the last salvation for destitute people.

I knew nothing of the workhouse really, only hearsay, but often Josh and I would walk past the dark and ugly building, with its slits in the walls for windows and grey palls of smoke belching from its chimneys. The very sight sent shivers down our spines, though never had we thought that place might one day be our fate.

Two boys at our school came from there and they were ragged and thin with cropped heads, and they'd do any favour for the tail end of a liquorice stick.

I heard Mother calling me and I went back into the kitchen to find all the family there; Lily with the sleeping baby in her arms, Arnold biting his nails and Josh eating a bit of bread and jam as if he thought it might be the last he'd get.

"So it's the workhouse," Mother said, looking from one to the other of us, as if she were conducting a military inspection.

"I know you boys were listening outside the front room door," she said, giving us a dark look, "so you needn't tell lies about it. I heard one of you breathing through the keyhole."

Lily said, "I was upstairs with the baby, Mum. I never heard anything."

Lily was the eldest and ready to leave school any time

now. She was to go into service when my mother had found a good place for her.

"Mr. Frogmorton came from the institution," Mother said, "and he wants the compensation money and our furniture. We won't be together any more. We will be split up. I will be in one part of the place, with the baby, and the rest of you . . . well, I can't say exactly what they will do with you. Of course it will be hard and strict; straw in the mattresses and very little to eat, and every child will have to be put to work."

Arnold was in tears again and Lily's face was chalk white with fear.

I could not understand my mother. She usually broke bad news gently, trying to save us from shock or too big a hurt. Now she was blatant, her voice brittle, without gentleness; her face was a mask of unconcern for us and at that moment she might have been a school teacher or the workhouse manager's wife. Didn't she care about any of us any more, I wondered?

The future ahead was dark, fraught with unknown miseries enough to send the blood chilling through our veins, yet Mother did nothing to comfort or minimise the horror.

"I won't go to that stink hole," Josh said, a growl in his throat, his jaw pushed out aggressively, "I'll run away to sea. They take cabin boys when they're eleven."

"And I will get a job in a good house straight away," Lily said, and she thrust the baby into my mother's arms as if she intended to walk out then and there before the workhouse could get her.

I put my arm round Arnold because I was sure I knew how he felt. There was an awful rumbling sound coming from the inside of my stomach and I thought of those two workhouse boys begging for a bit of liquorice. Would that be me before the month was out, with close cropped head and ragged trousers?

Mother put the baby down in her pram and her eyes were glinting as she gazed at us. "All right," she said, "you don't want to go to the workhouse and nor do I.

"There's one chance for us as I see it. We can stay here and we can work." She undid the cuffs of her blouse as she spoke and slowly started to roll her sleeves up to the elbows. Then she swung her big white apron from the peg behind the kitchen door and tied it round her waist.

"I can't do it alone," she said, "I want every one of

you to pull your weight and fight beside me. And mind," she added, "it will be a fight, make no mistake about that. It's us against the lot of them; us defending ourselves against hunger and the cold and keeping a roof over our heads. Frogmorton and the rent man and that Foundry devil think we can't do it, but I reckon we could, provided we make it a joint effort. I want no shirkers, no tired ones, no complaints, no tears or asking for anything. It will be a tug-of-war, us against them."

We listened and even Arnold stopped crying, and the baby slept as if she knew that was her best contribution at that moment.

My mother drew up a chair and we crowded round her. The workhouse, we felt, was a little farther away now. She had a plan and we waited and watched, like prisoners temporarily reprieved before the time of execution.

"I shall take in washing," Mother said, "and you are all going to help me. Lily will mind the baby, cook the meals, clean the house and do the mending. Josh will keep the fires going, stoke the copper, carry the coals, collect wood and fetch and return the finished laundry.

"Mike," and she turned to me, "will turn the mangle, run the errands, heat the irons and dig the garden and grow all our vegetables. Arnold—" and from his table-high position my small brother looked at her appealingly, but her face was as stern for him as for the rest of us—"Arnold will stop acting like a baby and he'll clean the shoes and boots for the family, take back jam jars and make himself useful at all times. Now," she finished, "if you don't like it, we can start getting ready for the workhouse at once."

My mother's first bundle of washing came from the police station—grimy blankets from the cells that hadn't seen soap in years.

Two-and-six she earned from that, but the police promised her a regular monthly order, and from that she graduated to the laundry from the school and the commercial hotel by the railway.

The copper was never out and, shirtless in the heat of the steam, Josh and I worked as hard as road navvies or the old-time galley slaves. There was no whip here, only the knowledge that the workhouse was waiting to swallow us if we failed to earn enough for our keep.

Mother always promised a fine finish wash, so it was the

ironing she spent most of her time on. When it was too cold to dry the clothes outside they stretched in lines across the scullery and kitchen, and we would eat our suppers of bread and marge and cocoa with the teasing drips of water tickling our necks.

The ten sovereigns of compensation remained on the high mantelpiece in a vase, untouched, and we lived by our efforts. If we ever spent that money we couldn't even go to the workhouse, for that would be our entrance fee.

Mother, dressed in her best black widow's weeds, would canvass the larger houses for business and she would offer a cheaper wash than the established laundries could do. She cut her prices so fine I used to wonder sometimes where the profit was.

Yet we lived well enough for those times and I can't remember ever going to school hungry, though I was fast forgetting the taste of liquorice and acid drops. Even if we boys earned a halfpenny running an errand for a neighbour or the cobbler or held a horse's head for a carter, we always turned over the money to my mother. There was a strict rule about this, for in our house never a crust must be wasted or a farthing spent that could be saved.

No-one complained, not even Arnold, for the workhouse boys at school could be seen daily and the reminder was always there, though never spoken of now.

Every shilling Mother earned she would turn over and over in her hand, her shield in the valiant fight against the threat to her family and her own independence. Her spirit never flagged and she would work tirelessly for hours without ceasing, a mug of strong, black tea beside her as she stood at the ironing board.

It was a cold winter's day when I went up to the Marshalls' house with the returned clean laundry. This was really Josh's task but he had a bad cold and had been excused all duties for that Saturday. The snow came over my ankles and there were chilblains on my hands and I was hungry for my supper.

I went to the back door and knocked respectfully. The housekeeper was a hard woman and I knew I wouldn't be invited in out of the cold.

She opened the door, snatched the laundry and glared at me.

"I hope it isn't damp, my lad."

It wasn't. I had protected the parcel all the way there under my coat. I knew she would inspect every piece of the washing before she would hand over the money.

I looked up at the house. To my young eyes it was like a palace and I wondered what it would be like to be rich and never have the fear of the workhouse looming over you.

That day the woman made me wait fifteen minutes, and by then my footprints in the drive had been covered by fresh snow and my ears were dead with the cold, icy air.

The housekeeper grudgingly handed over the two shillings and then told me the lady of the house had some second-hand children's clothes and would be willing to sell them to my mother.

Only a few coppers she would ask, perhaps, and that way we stayed decently clad and never ran barefooted or without a coat. Yet the coppers paid would be missed from my mother's careful budget, though somehow I knew she would manage it, for no-one gave anything away in those days. Poverty was too familiar and commonplace for the wealthy people even to notice, and least of all care how a widow with five children managed.

I ran back down the drive through the stinging sleet and I remembered that my mother had said I could buy threepenny-worth of pease pudding on the way back home for our supper.

I thought of the warmth of the shop and Mrs. Roberts behind the counter, large and fat and smiling in her white overall.

I started to run faster, my feet sinking deep into the snow, and then it was that I realised my frozen, numb hand was empty.

The two shilling piece had gone.

I stopped, the breath catching in my throat, my heart thumping. It was dark now so that the world around me was all black and white and empty of all sound.

Somewhere between the house and the lane I had lost the money . . .

I knew the futility of searching for it in that blizzard, yet I tried—retracing my steps, crawling on all fours, running my fingers through the pillows of snow, while I sobbed with misery and frustration, knowing the hours my mother had stood at the ironing board last night to earn this precious two shillings.

When I got home, covered from head to foot in snow, my

knees scratched from the searching and the tears dried black on my cheeks, I looked round at the family. They were sitting up to the table with empty plates in front of them, spoons at the ready to tackle the pease pudding I hadn't bought.

My mother was over by the range, and with a jug of steaming cocoa she went to the table.

I closed the back door, trembling at the thought of her wrath. I had wondered about lying to her, pretending the housekeeper hadn't paid me or that a man had jumped out in the night and knocked me down for the money.

But she was shrewd. She would see through a lie as easily as through glass.

"Pease pud," Arnold said, banging his spoon on the table, "where's the pease pud?"

Mother put down the jug of cocoa and came towards me.

She took my cold hands in her warm ones and though I tried to speak, to tell her what had happened, I couldn't. It was as if the snow and the wind had choked up my throat and left me mute.

Suddenly my head was against her chest and then her arms were round me, and she loved me again as if I were a baby.

"What is it?" she said. "Did you lose the two shillings, Mike?"

I nodded, still unable to speak. Then she led me to the fire, took off my coat and boots and sat me in the old leather armchair.

She took three pennies from her purse and handed them to Lily.

"The pease pudding," she said, "and be quick about it, my girl."

The next Bank Holiday Mother took the day off and with a picnic we went up on Sawyer's Heath. Every other family from the town had the same idea, it seemed, for there was hardly room to sit anywhere.

We had set out early and Mother had claimed a tree so that we'd have the shade from it, and she spread a cloth on the grass and Lily unpacked the basket of food.

Baby Ann lay gurgling contentedly on a rug, and after dinner Josh and I ran down to the stream and paddled in the cool water, carrying our boots by the laces, and the freedom from the smell of steam and soap and our life of labour made us feel light-headed and delirious with happiness.

"There's a fair in the valley," Josh said. "I heard the

butcher's boy talking about it. A penny to go in, and round-abouts and coconut shies and a Punch and Judy show." He picked stones out of the shallow water and held them in his hand. "Wish they were gold, then we could go to the fair."

He wanted too much, I thought, for wasn't it enough to be out in the open with the sun warm on our faces and the air good and clean? We'd had a good dinner of cold pork and bread and home-made lemonade that Lily had bottled from two cheap lemons.

Josh said, "Why don't we go to the fair? We can dodge in somehow without paying."

"Mother wouldn't like us to do that," I answered.

She was strictly honest and the only time she had ever raised her hand to us was when Josh, Arnold and I had hung on the back of a fruit cart and encouraged three apples to roll towards us.

We were having tea from what was left in the picnic basket, when a shadow blotted out the sun.

Mother was nursing the baby and I heard Lily gasp under her breath, "It's the Foundry devil—Bunyon."

It was, too, in his best suit and wearing a straw hat. He was dry-washing his hands as usual and he smiled on us as if he thought it would make our day.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Grace," he purred, "it would appear the whole town is taking the air this fine day. We must thank the powers that be that created the Bank Holiday."

My mother nodded to him politely, but Lily's eyes were flashing and I knew she was thinking of the poor compensation money.

"Mrs. Grace," Bunyon said in his teeth-whistling voice, "I hear good reports of you. The school and the commercial hotel and some of our best houses are very much in favour of your laundry; they say you live up to your boast of a fine finish. Indeed, I hear that you actually maintain your little family by your efforts."

"They all help me," Mother said.

"Ah, most noble." Bunyon turned his smiling face round to include us all, but Josh and I were scowling and Lily's flushed face was enough to tell him her opinion.

"The managers at the Foundry would like to help you, Mrs. Grace; not that they are under any obligation to do so, of course, but they are generous, thoughtful men and kindly towards widows whose men once worked for them. So, dear Mrs. Grace, how would you like the Foundry wash? Five

shillings a week that would bring you in and regular work."

I thought Lily would up and scratch his face, but my mother stayed calm. After a considerable pause she bowed her head to Bunyon.

"Thank you, sir, that is indeed most thoughtful. I shall be happy and grateful to do the Foundry wash and you can expect as fine a finish as anyone, only the charge will be . . . six shillings a week."

Bunyon laughed throatily. "So you're going to bargain with me; a business woman, I can see that. All right, dear lady, six shillings it will be and for that you must do all we send you."

When Bunyon had touched his straw hat and moved off, Lily rounded on Mother. "Oh, how could you? That toad, that Foundry, their filthy washing. Father would turn in his grave."

"Be quiet," Mother ordered, "you'll wake the baby. Six shillings will pay our rent, so in a manner of speaking the Foundry will be keeping a roof over our heads."

Lily turned on her side and buried her face in the grass, but my mother had no sympathy for her tears.

Instead she opened her purse. "You boys want to go to the fair. We've just had a nice little windfall of business come our way, so I can spare a few coppers; away with you and enjoy yourselves."

Josh and I ran down the hill with Arnold trailing behind. We could hear the music from the roundabouts and when we paid our pennies at the gate and charged into the arena of wonder and excitement, none of us could find it in our hearts to hate Mr. Bunyon or the Foundry managers.

When the war came in 1914 Mother bribed a lift from Dobie, the coal cart man. She wanted a ride out to Cranby, three miles away. We weren't told her reasons. We just watched her climb up beside the driver, with the coal bags behind, and Dobie worried in case his wife should see he had a lady passenger.

When Mother returned she was smiling and from her shopping bag she took fruit and cakes and sweets. We fell upon the feast and were too busy eating to ask any questions.

Only my sister Lily stood back, surprised, wondering how Mother could have had the temerity to spend so lavishly.

"I have captured the soldiers' wash," Mother said. "I went to the camp at Cranby and spoke to the officer in

charge. The men are living under canvas and have no way of doing their own laundry; for every bag we take there will be ninepence."

She clasped her hands together as if we had just come into a fortune. "Just think of it, ninepence a bag." Her eyes shone with success and we had not seen her so happy since the days when my father was alive.

"There are over a hundred men in the field and I'm to have the whole order."

"We'll never do it," Lily gasped, "we only have the one copper. And we still have all our other orders and we dare not neglect them, for the soldiers' work will only be temporary. They will be leaving for France soon—"

"But others will take their place for training in the field at Cranby. This is a red letter day, so don't spoil it, girl."

My mother refused to be overawed by the thought of all that work, though I noticed she didn't take off her coat but went on standing there, a thoughtful look in her eyes.

Then she snapped her fingers. "I will rent the old rectory in Wayne Street. The kitchen is as big as a barn and I will get Mrs. Gibbons to give me a hand. She can do with the extra with all the mouths she has to feed."

Now after school, it was to the old rectory that we went to be fed a quick tea by Lily before the work began for us boys.

The soldiers' wash was no easy task and the scrubbing and boiling would go on sometimes until ten and eleven at night.

Exhausted, Josh and I would fall into bed with aching backs and lie there in the dark, thinking of Saturday morning when we would have to pull the handcart Mother had hired, for the three-mile walk to the camp to return the finished laundry.

By the end of the war we had moved into the rectory and we had five women working for us. We had our own horse and cart and Josh cut a fine figure, sitting up there holding the reins and wearing a peaked cap. Lily was the packer and sorter, I did the accounts and Arnold had become chief stoker and handyman around the laundry.

There was never any question of our working outside the family business, for now we took a pride in it and saw *The Better Finish Laundry*, not as a means to an end, as it was originally and our escape from the workhouse, but money-making with a future for us all.

When Mother died in her late seventies she left five highly

successful laundries. She had retired many years before from active work, yet to the end of her life she kept an eye on the running of her business.

Josh, Arnold and I were in charge now, joint directors, with the two girls as sleeping partners.

We had all married and had our own homes and families, and to our children we always stressed that, "Gran was a wonderful business woman."

In her will Mother left each of her five children two gold sovereigns from the compensation money that had come from the Foundry.

She had never cashed them. They were her security from those early days and the thought of them in the vase gave her a sense of comfort. For her children would never starve while she had gold in the house.

In a codicil to her will she had written:

> From my heart I thank you for saving *me* from the workhouse in 1912 . . . but what you never seemed to realise was that we created our own *workhouse*; and I was harder on you than any master at the institution would have been. It was the price we had to pay for our freedom.
>
> In my safe at the office I keep my two gold sovereigns. I will never cash them . . . and I think Mother would have known why.

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ANSWERS TO THE BOOK QUIZ ON PAGE 77

1. *The Story of San Michele.*
2. Colin Henry.
3. (a) and (e); (b) and (d); (c) and (f).
4. All of them.
5. Graham Greene.
6. True.
7. (a).
8. St. Petersburg, on the Mississippi.
9. *As You Like It.*
10. Charles Hamilton.
11. *The Old Curiosity Shop.*
12. John Cleland.

A SPOT OF IRISH BLARNEY

Allegories on the banks of the Nile

by JOHN D. SHERIDAN

THERE are few things as refreshing as the genuine malapropism, that inspired blunder which lights up meaning with a near miss. It has overtones, like Joyce's prose; it has something in common with impressionist painting and modern poetry, whilst being more intelligible than either of them; and it gives a lift to the heart. But it must be spontaneous and authentic—this is the soul of the business. The synthetic malapropism, like the synthetic schoolboy howler, never rings true. The man who had a pain in his "grind" and spoke of some trouble in his "abominable wall" was probably thought up by a third year medical wishing to be the life and soul of the party. For you can't make up malapropisms, no matter how hard you try. The thing is a gift, like absolute pitch, and as much a way of thinking as a way of speaking.

Genuine malapropisms, however, are not nearly as common as they used to be; nor, I think, half as good. The poor woman who was constantly falling into areas with her landlord has been dead for a long time, and she no longer hears the rain drumming on her congregated roof. Perhaps the Compulsory School Attendance Act has had something to do with the decline. One way or another, the blight of literacy is over all the land.

You can't collect malapropisms by random eavesdropping in buses and public bars. The thing to do is to find a good mark and hang on his words. But these rare souls are hard to come by, and for years the best bet around these parts was Alphonsus. Things have not been quite the same since he

went to Coventry, where I am sure he is still distilling sunshine. Though "Coventry" wasn't what Alphonsus called it. He called it "Conventry." That was the way with him.

He was very fond of Gilbert and Sullivan, and his favourite opera was *The Pirates of Penzance*, which he knew from beginning to end. The only thing about it he didn't know was its name. He called it "The Pirates of PenzNance."

We always knew that there was good stuff in him, and he was coming along nicely when he left us. He wasn't always at his best, but even in his less inspired moments he could come up with things like "a collation government" and "mare's shanks." But we were patient with him and we took the good with the bad. After all, Boswell had many a lean day.

One of his best efforts happened when we were talking one day about a pending labour dispute and the advisability of arbitration. Alphonsus was all for moderation, and he summed up brilliantly. "They'll have to settle it some time," he said, "so why not now? Here's my suggestion. They should come together, pending negation, and even if nothing transfers, sure there's no harm done."

Alphonsus was a motor mechanic, and his trade showed through at times. When the people next door moved, he announced that their furniture had gone to the Liverpool boat in a big "pantyignition." He used to speak of "shock absolvers" and "oil in the sunk," and once when I grumbled because some repairs hadn't been done, he said, "Ah, sure I haven't had a minute all day—I've been hard at it since cockroach." But I needn't worry. I could rest insured that he would do my car the first chance he got.

When he was having trouble with his nose the doctor cleaned out his "scientists," and then gave him a bottle that tasted like "gall and woodworm."

Once, I remember, he brought off a magnificent double header. Talking about one of the locals who, he maintained, was not as wise as he pretended to be, he said, "That fella gives me the pip. He thinks he knows everything. Who does he think he is, anyway—Solomon Gomorrah?"

We were all sorry when Alphonsus went to England, and sorrier still that we hadn't taken fuller notes while we had him.

His successor at the garage isn't a patch on him. He makes occasional blunders, but they are poor things compared with the mighty explosions of old. He raised our hopes one day

when he said that he was going down to make a call from the telephone cossack, but his harp never spoke again.

It's a sore pity that Alphonsus ever went to England, for we could ill afford to lose him. But sure that's the way it has been with us for over a century. Emigration is still taking the cream of the country.

But there are hierarchies even among makers of malapropisms. Your general practitioner may muddle a phrase once in a while, but it takes a smudge of genius to muddle two phrases at once and fuse them unforgettably and for ever. This is the real virtuoso touch, and even for the masters it is a rare achievement.

But it was my privilege to come by this type of malapropism once, and the magic of it is with me still. I had never met the man before, nor have I met him since ("Ah, did you once see Shelley plain?"), but once sufficed, for I came upon him when he was in the white heat of inspiration.

He was standing at a bar counter drinking a pint of stout, and after every sip he wrinkled up his face as if he hated the stuff or suspected traces of strychnine in the tumbler. He was not of our party, but he joined it by saying, "Humph," now and again.

I forget what we were talking about, but the context is neither here nor there. What matters, and what I remember, is not the discussion but the way the master capped it: capped it and rounded it off in one flaming sentence. "What they are doing," he said, "is trying to make a molehill out of Mahomet." It was my big moment, and the memory of it is still green. Nothing will ever illiterate it from my mind.

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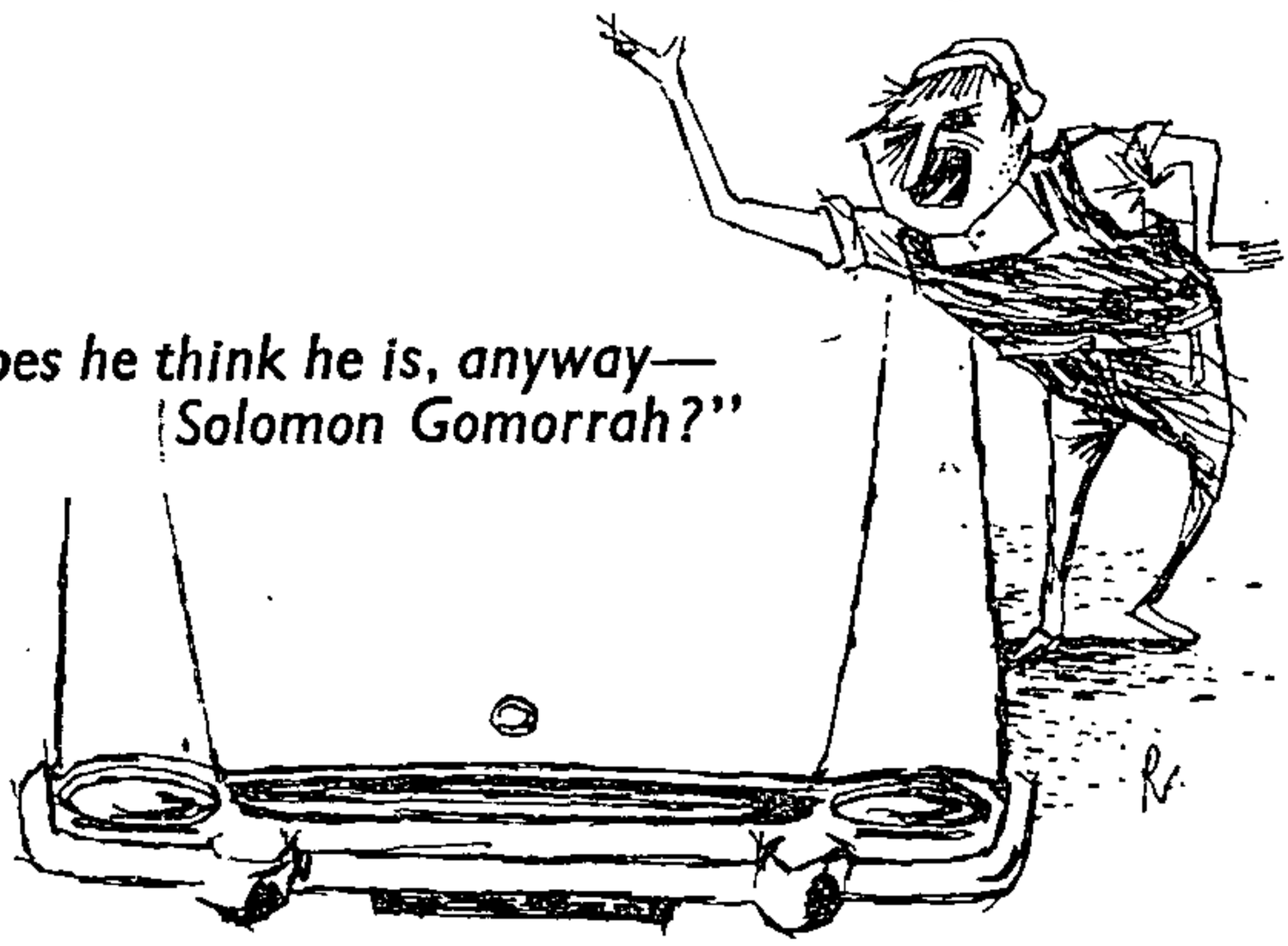


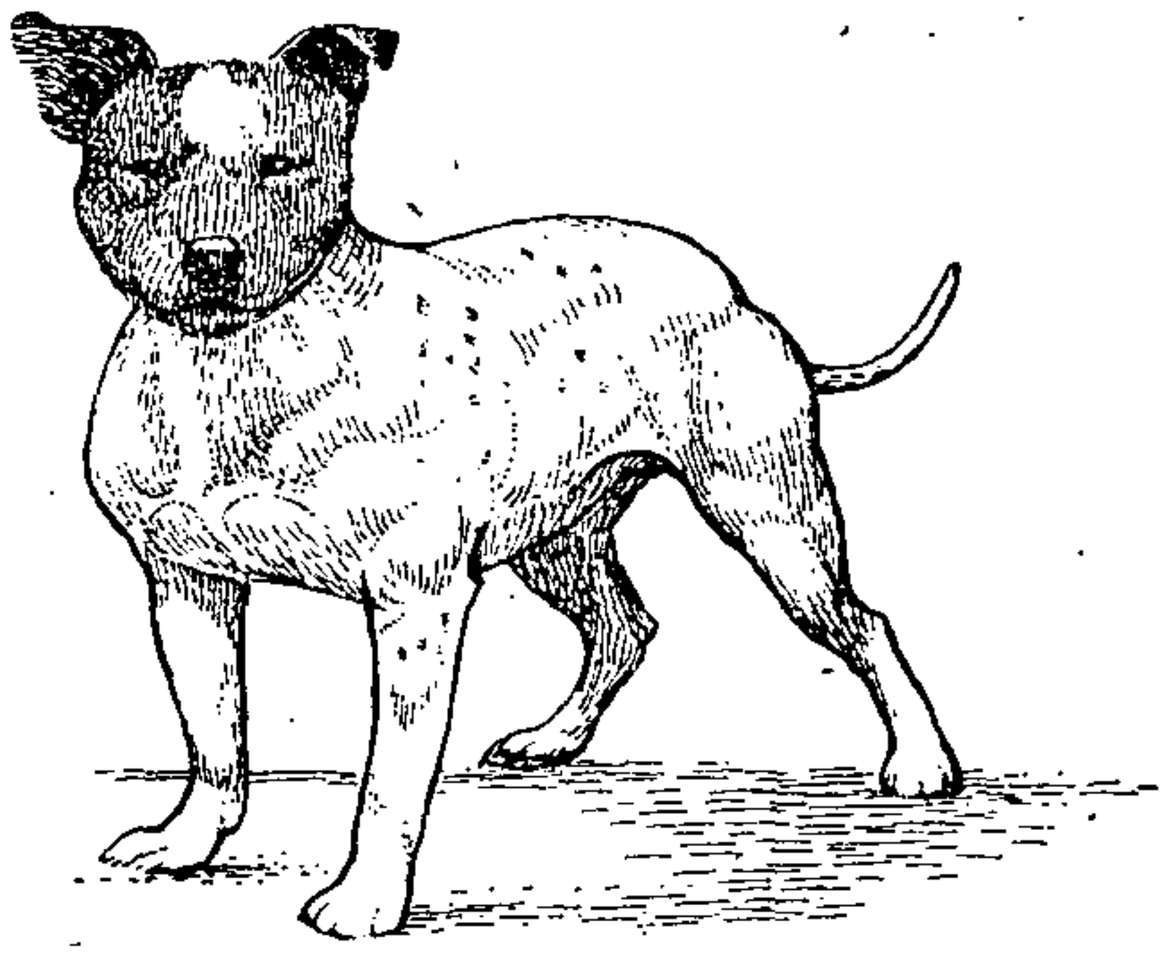
" Who does he think he is, anyway—
Solomon Gomorrah?"

TO SOME fame comes early, to others late and to others, equally justified, it never comes at all. So it is particularly gratifying to me that fame has at last come to Beauregard Bugleboy III, though sadly posthumously. And it is typical of his life that his belated fame should have come through a stroke of irony that partook of the flavour of his life and times.

Beauregard Bugleboy III, like a few men with a peculiar talent for living or one of the other arts, had long enjoyed respect and devotion among a limited

BEAUREGARD BUGLEBOY III

by Borden Deal



circle of knowledgeable and perceptive *cognoscenti*. But national fame burst upon him suddenly, years after he had departed on his mysterious way. This is how it happened.

Beauregard Bugleboy III was a dog, known among his intimates as Beau. Several years after he had passed out of my life I wrote a story about another dog (fictitious) for a magazine. I mentioned in passing my association with Beau; and I immediately received a flood of mail. Not about my writing—not about my story, or the dog in the story—but about Beauregard Bugleboy III. Now his fame rests securely in many minds and many hands. I know that wherever he may be Beauregard Bugleboy III appreciates this last turn of fate, for he could enjoy a stroke of irony as well as the next dog.

It behoves me, now, to set down the facts, to complete the record, to do my duty as his oldest and closest friend.

Beau came to us during our sojourn in Mobile, Alabama. I remember the day distinctly. We had just been to a Red Skelton movie and were walking home the few short blocks up Government Street. It was a dreary day, cold and rainy, and after one block I noted that we were being followed.

Mobile is full of stray dogs. But this was not merely a stray, though he was certainly thin enough and bedraggled enough and cold enough to qualify for the role. But there was a certain air of purposiveness about him that belied any shiftless quality. We could feel that, after a calculated act of appraisal and ratiocination, we had been chosen. We had been assessed and found adequate and there was a certain warmth in the knowledge of being selected, out of all the cinema crowd, and followed by this particular dog.

There were no rash overtures, no demeaning waggings of the tail and wrigglings of the body. There was no mournfulness of the eye, no cringing, no attempt to play upon human sympathy for the coldness and wetness of the day. He merely came behind us at a discreet distance, close enough to associate himself definitely with our progress, distant enough to avoid embarrassment on either his part or ours. He reserved to himself the right to change his mind after further appraisal and association.

Once only I stopped and spoke to him. He stopped too, looking at me, then he turned away, with neither fear nor disdain, and trotted with dignity around the corner. I felt slightly abashed, as though I had failed to achieve membership in a strange club with mysterious standards and ritual. I

had always prided myself on a love for, and understanding of, dogs in general and in particular. Since I was a boy I had raised and trained dogs of various breeds and not once had I ever failed in establishing rapport. But this was a dog of another colour of mind than any I had ever known before.

We went on and within another block he was behind us again, at exactly the same distance. We arrived at the apartment, went inside, and closed the door. I looked back just before he was lost from view and saw that he was sitting down calmly in the drizzling rain.

"He's looking for a human," I told Babs. "He thought he'd found a human. But then he wasn't so sure."

"We haven't had a dog in a long time now," she said.

"He's not waiting for us to choose him," I said. "We're waiting to see if he chooses us. It's a peculiar feeling, isn't it? I know what a real stray feels like, now."

There was a sound at the door. I went to it, opened, and he looked up at me. He calmly walked into the apartment, looked around, studied me and my wife. Then he chose a scatter rug and with a sigh of relief plumped himself down on it. He put his head on his paw and in a minute was sound asleep. Beauregard Bugleboy III had made his decision.

Beau was not a mongrel; he was of mixed breeds. He was basically terrier. He had a lithe, chunky body, well-muscled in the legs, with a fine head. He was predominantly white but underlying the white were blue Dalmatian spots that gave his whiteness a bluish cast. His head was black, with a white blaze in the forehead. He was compact, his hair lying close and neat to his body, and he always kept himself scrupulously clean. But, most of all, within his fine head there worked an original and perceptive brain.

Most dogs, even the most intelligent, yield themselves without reserve to their human masters. But there was a distinct reserve in Beau, an independence I had seen before only in cats. One could never take him for granted, as I found out years later, for it was in taking Beau for granted that I lost him in the end. There was a definite give-and-take in any relationship with him and always one was aware of dealing with an independent intelligence.

Beau was marked by his previous life. Though he was immediately at home with us, though he took command of the animal population of the apartment house and established

his guardianship over our belongings, there remained always the air of tentativeness in his entrance into our life. Always within him was the knowledge of his previous days when he had been a dog on the loose, shifting for himself within a seaport city. He possessed a wiliness, a wariness, that never deserted him even in his sleep. Graven deep in his soul was uncertainty, awareness, a memory of hungry days and missed meals.

His feeding habits were original, to say the least. He ate, always, with a delicate daintiness, almost a finickiness. Never once did I see him gulp his food, even the very first time I fed him, when he must have been ravenous. And though he ate only at stated intervals of the day, his time for feeding never varying by more than ten minutes, he demanded that his food bowl be full at all times.

If it was not full, through some mischance, he felt deeply that he had eaten the last meal in the world; and he worried about it. Even if he had just completed a good meal he knew the immediate pangs of starvation. He would wander about the apartment, trying to forget the fact that his food bowl was empty. But he could not forget and soon his wanderings would bring him once again to nose its emptiness. He would come to me and talk about how empty the dish was, wondering with almost-conversation if it was ever going to be filled again. When it was filled once more he was instantly at peace with the world; he would not feel the need to eat, but would wait calmly until his next feeding time.

Shortly after his arrival in our midst we moved to a garage apartment and acquired our first baby. Here Beau had a yard to himself and an added responsibility. He took over guardianship of the baby, watching her both inside the house and outside. At night he slept under her crib. Beau was never a rambler and he did not seem to be interested in other dogs, male or female. He lived in a world of himself and his humans.

It was in this time that I saw him make his first mistake. Perhaps he was becoming a little too secure, a little too distant from his solitary years when danger had been a constant presence with him. He began chasing cars.

Our street was a quiet street, with little traffic. He began first with bicycles and for the first time I saw him exhibit exuberance. But within a day or two he graduated to cars. I tried to break him of the habit. But, as I said, Beau had a mind of his own. At last, one day, I heard a screech of

brakes and a terrified yelp from Beau. I rushed outside and saw him streak by me, screaming at the top of his lungs. He disappeared rapidly across a long empty stretch of land a couple of streets behind us, where the railroad tracks were.

I ran after him, afraid that he was badly hurt. The woman who had run over him was out of her car and running too. He was gone out of sight. I crossed the railroad tracks, calling. But I knew that he was gone for good, he would never come back to the street where he had been injured.

There was a sudden rush in a clump of bushes. Beau came out of them on a hard run and leapt into my arms, staggering me backwards with his catapulting weight. He was trembling violently and I had to carry him all the way to the house. He was not injured in the slightest, only shaken up. But he did not leave the house for three days; and never afterwards in his whole life did he chase another car.

Beauregard Bugleboy III was a city dog. Soon after his adventure with the motor age we moved to a small town, Scottsboro, Alabama—into my wife's old family home. So far as I knew, Beau had never ridden in a car before in his life. He submitted to the move, though dubiously. But all the long way north through Alabama he lay resigned on the floor of the back seat, his nose stuffed with the hateful mechanical smells of the car. Only when we passed through the successive towns did he rouse himself, inquiring eagerly if this was the place. When we proceeded and the open countryside surrounded us once again, he withdrew himself with resignation, only to rise up with incorrigible optimism when we came to the edge of the next town. He did not, could not, believe that our destination would lie in the countryside, for he knew only city living.

The Scottsboro house had a huge yard on a corner lot, shaded by giant oaks. It was a lovely place for a dog. Beau established himself in the neighbourhood with his usual mastery, with no apparent regrets for Mobile or anything he had known before. He whipped a couple of obstreperous contemporaries who resented his new presence . . . he was always a vicious and ruthless fighter for he had learned to brawl on the docks . . . and within a day or two he had made acquaintance with the butcher of a near-by supermarket.

He had never been a scavenger. But I think, out of all his life, he was proudest of this diplomatic stroke. It was something to see Beau coming proudly into the yard from the direction of the store with a whole rib-cage of beef in his

mouth, his head carried high to keep from getting the bones dirty on the ground. He always demanded that one come to see his new acquisition.

It was about this time too, that Beau decided he must accompany me to check the mail at the post office. This was a regular routine with me, as with any freelancing writer. The post office was only a few blocks away, downtown, and I knew the times of day when the mail was put up. I always checked the box within five or ten minutes afterwards, so my times for walking to the post office were well-established.

At first I allowed Beau to go with me. He would walk proudly in front, his tail erect and wagging. He liked to walk with me, liked the feeling of owning and being owned that it gave him. Somehow it confirmed within his soul the fact that he was not a stray, that he owned humans like any respectable dog. He had never forgotten his lonely days; and he took greater pride in his humans than any dog I have ever known.

But his pride overcame him so irresistibly that he would race and bark in the post office while I checked the mail, informing everyone within hearing that Beauregard Bugleboy III was with his master at the post office for the purpose of seeing if we had any mail. Outside in the street, he would race and bark, almost heedless of the cars in his excitement. I feared that he might once again be hurt.

He had never liked a leash. His free soul could not tolerate the thought of restraint. Though he took pride in walking with me he did not wish to do it under such conditions. But I decided that, if he went with me to the post office, a leash would be necessary.

The first day I called him, he came to me. I put on the leash and set out. He came, all right, but shamefaced, his tail drooping. He could not look his acquaintances, dog or man, in the face. The next day, when I called him, he did not come. I called several times but he was not within hearing.

I started on to the post office, thinking that he must have made an expedition to the grocery store. Halfway downtown, he rose from behind a bush where he had been waiting hidden for me. I snapped my fingers and called him. He came running, sure that everything was forgiven and forgotten. I caught him by the scruff of the neck, took the leash out of my pocket despite the reproachful, betrayed expression on his face, and put it on him. In the disgrace and humiliation

of chains he went with me to the post office. But that was positively the last time.

From that day forward, the post office trip became a battle of wits and wills. Each morning he would hide somewhere between home and downtown. Each morning I would try to call him to me, tempting him even with food. He would refuse to come; and now, also, he would refuse to come within arms' reach even after we had started, for he knew I had the leash in my pocket.

It was frustrating, infuriating; and yet one had to admire his independence, his originality, his ingenious subterfuges. Soon his whole mornings were devoted to the single-minded purpose of outwitting me. Immediately after breakfast he would disappear. A friend might tell me of his whereabouts, coming in to say that he had seen Beau hiding behind a bush.

"He's laying for you," they'd tell me, laughing, because it was known all over town how constantly he outwitted me, how daily the battle of wills raged. He had always been a reasonably obedient dog, unless your wishes flew in the face of all his logic, and he continued to be—except at that time of day. After the trip was negotiated he would come to me willingly at a whistle or a mere motion of the hand. But hardly ever after did I get the leash on him for our downtown trip though, stubborn as Beau, I continued trying.

Beauregard Bugleboy III was a great dog, a great mind. Living with him was like living with a complicated, intense human personality. He had his lapses, his uncertainties, his neuroticisms. He did not make friends easily with either dogs or humans; but when he made friends he was a good friend. He lived a modest, sparing life, without excesses. He was a thinking dog. In one of the trees in our yard, a wily squirrel lived which he chased halfheartedly, off and on, until he got tired of being eluded and derided. He buckled down to a solid week of concentration until he figured out a way to cut off the squirrel before it arrived safely at a tree. When he caught it he shook it gently once or twice, then turned it loose to scamper away in freedom. He did not take any further interest after he had once demonstrated his success.

When the children were in the yard, he considered it his duty to post himself between them and the street, regardless of how they rambled and played. He considered that his post involved certain duties and responsibilities that he discharged conscientiously, while at the same time maintaining his integrity and independence.

It was my own fault that we lost Beau. He had been with us for three years and I was confident in him, I felt that he was confident in me. I had begun to take him for granted.

One day a mangy female followed my oldest daughter into the yard and decided to stay. I left her alone for a day, thinking she would go on home. But no. I decided to run her off, knowing she was owned.

She wouldn't run very well, for she had decided she belonged to Ashley, our daughter. When I demanded her departure, she withdrew under the house. I found a handful of gravel and began throwing it under the house to drive her out. Beau was under the house. After the third throw he came out . . . gave me a disgusted look . . . and disappeared.

I had known he was under the house. But I had not expected him to take the gravel personally, knowing that this was his home and his people. But we never saw him again. Far back in his mind he must have held always to the thought that some day the good life he had found must come to an end, some day he must launch himself into the world once more on his own, pursuing his dangerous existence independently of his human masters and companions.

The day I threw the gravel under the house, he knew that the time had come. I was driving him away, I had withdrawn from our gentleman's agreement—just as he had expected me to do eventually. So with dignity and sadness, without reproach or regrets, he had arisen and departed.

For weeks I hunted and searched for him, for weeks longer we hoped that he would change his mind and return. But Beauregard Bugleboy III was never seen by us again.

So with satisfaction, though riven by the continuing hurt of our final misunderstanding, I feel that Beauregard Bugleboy III, somewhere alive or dead, is aware and appreciative of the final irony of his national fame. He was an original, he was a genius among dogs; and fame is only his due. For this reason I have set down this account of his life that I knew.

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SOLUTION TO AUGUST TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS. 1, Pikestaff. 6, Roc. 8, Arrays. 9, Bight. 10, Scheme. 11, Cheetah. 13, Risotto. 16, Studio. 18, Nylon. 19, Artist. 21, Eft. 22, Scarecrow.

DOWN. 1, Par. 2, Knave. 3, Suspect. 4, Arable. 5, Fright. 7, Cut-throat. 8, Assurance. 12, Hostage. 14, Splits. 15, Tundra. 17, Utter. 20, Sow.

GALLERY of GREATS

TWO BLUE BIRDS

by D. H. Lawrence

THERE was a woman who loved her husband, but she could not live with him. The husband, on his side, was sincerely attached to his wife, yet he could not live with her. They were both under forty, both handsome and both attractive. They had the most sincere regard for one another, and felt, in some odd way, eternally married to one another. They knew one another more intimately than they knew anybody else; they felt more known to one another than to any other person.

Yet they could not live together. Usually, they kept a thousand miles apart, geographically. But when he sat in the greyness of England, at the back of his mind, with a certain grim fidelity, he was aware of his wife, her strange yearning to be loyal and faithful, having her gallant affairs away in the sun, in the south. And she, as she drank her cocktail on the terrace over the sea, and turned her grey, sardonic eyes on the heavy dark face of her admirer, whom she really liked quite a lot, she was actually preoccupied with the clear-cut features of her handsome young husband, thinking of how he would be asking his secretary to do something for him, asking in that good-natured, confident voice of a man who knows that his request will be only too gladly fulfilled.

The secretary, of course, adored him. She was *very* competent, quite young, and quite good-looking. She adored him. But then all his servants always did, particularly his women servants. His men servants were likely to swindle him.

When a man has an adoring secretary, and you are the

man's wife, what are you to do? Not that there was anything "wrong"—if you know what I mean—between them. Nothing you could call adultery, to come down to brass tacks. No, no! They were just the young master and his secretary. He dictated to her, she slaved for him and adored him, and the whole thing went on wheels.

He didn't "adore" her. A man doesn't need to adore his secretary. But he depended on her. "I simply rely on Miss Wrexall." Whereas he could never rely on his wife. The one thing he knew finally about *her* was that she didn't intend to be relied on.

So they remained friends, in the awful unspoken intimacy of the once-married. Usually each year they went away together for a holiday, and, if they had not been man and wife, they would have found a great deal of fun and stimulation in one another. The fact that they were married, had been married for the last dozen years, and couldn't live together for the last three or four, spoilt them for one another. Each had a private feeling of bitterness about the other.

However, they were awfully kind. He was the soul of generosity, and held her in real tender esteem, no matter how many gallant affairs she had. Her gallant affairs were part of her modern necessity. "After all, I've got to *live*. I can't turn into a pillar of salt in five minutes just because you and I can't live together! It takes years for a woman like me to turn into a pillar of salt. At least I hope so!"

"Quite!" he replied. "Quite. By all means put them in pickle, make pickled cucumbers of them, before you crystallise out. That's my advice."

He was like that: so awfully clever and enigmatic. She could more or less fathom the idea of the pickled cucumbers, but the "crystallising out"—what did that signify?

And did he mean to suggest that he himself had been well pickled and that further immersion was for him unnecessary, would spoil his flavour? Was that what he meant? And herself, was she the brine and the vale of tears?

You never knew how catty a man was being, when he was really clever and enigmatic, withal a bit whimsical. He was adorably whimsical, with a twist of his flexible, vain mouth, that had a long upper lip, so fraught with vanity! But then a handsome, clear-cut, histrionic young man like that, how could he help being vain? The women made him so.

Ah, the women! How nice men would be if there were no other women!

And how nice the women would be if there were no other men! That's the best of a secretary. She may have a husband, but a husband is the mere shred of a man, compared to a boss, a chief, a man who dictates to you and whose words you faithfully write down and then transcribe. Imagine a wife writing down anything her husband said to her— But a secretary! Every *and* and *but* of his she preserves for ever. What are candied violets in comparison!

Now it is all very well having gallant affairs under the southern sun, when you know there is a husband whom you adore dictating to a secretary whom you are too scornful to hate yet whom you rather despise, though you allow she has her good points, away north in the place you ought to regard as home. A gallant affair isn't much good when you've got a bit of grit in your eye. Or something at the back of your mind.

What's to be done? The husband, of course, did not send his wife away.

"You've got your secretary and your work;" she said: "There's no room for me."

"There's a bedroom and a sitting room exclusively for you," he replied. "And a garden and half a motor-car. But please yourself entirely. Do what gives you most pleasure."

"In that case," she said, "I'll just go south for the winter."

"Yes, do!" he said. "You always enjoy it."

"I always do," she replied.

They parted with a certain relentlessness that had a touch of wistful sentiment behind it. Off she went to her gallant affairs, that were like the curate's egg, palatable in parts. And he settled down to work. He said he hated working, but he never did anything else. Ten or eleven hours a day. That's what it is to be your own master!

So the winter wore away, and it was spring, when the swallows homeward fly, or northward, in this case. This winter, one of a series similar, had been rather hard to get through. The bit of grit in the gallant lady's eye had worked deeper in the more she blinked. Dark faces might be dark, and icy cocktails might lend a glow; she blinked her hardest to blink that bit of grit away, without success. Under the spicy balls of the mimosa she thought of that husband of hers in his library, and of that neat, competent but *common* little secretary of his, for ever taking down what he said.

"How a man can *stand* it! How *she* can stand it, common

little thing as she is, I don't know!" the wife cried to herself.

She meant this dictating business, this ten hours a day intercourse, *à deux*, with nothing but a pencil between them, and a flow of words.

What was to be done? Matters, instead of improving, had grown worse. The little secretary had brought her mother and sister into the establishment. The mother was a sort of cook-housekeeper, the sister was a sort of upper maid—she did the fine laundry, and looked after "his" clothes, and valeted him beautifully. It was really an excellent arrangement. The old mother was a splendid plain cook, the sister was all that could be desired as a *valet de chambre*, a fine laundress, an upper parlourmaid, and a table-waiter. And all economical to a degree. They knew his affairs by heart. His secretary flew to town when a creditor became dangerous, and she *always* smoothed over the financial crisis.

"He," of course, had debts, and he was working to pay them off. And if he had been a fairy prince who could call the ants to help him, he would not have been more wonderful than in securing this secretary and her family. They took hardly any wages. And they seemed to perform the miracle of loaves and fishes daily.

"She," of course, was the wife who loved her husband, but helped him into debt, and she still was an expensive item. Yet when she appeared at her "home," the secretarial family received her with most elaborate attentions and deference. The knight returning from the Crusades didn't create a greater stir. She felt like Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth, a sovereign paying a visit to her faithful subjects. But perhaps there lurked always this hair in her soup! Won't they be glad to be rid of me again!

But they protested No! No! They had been waiting and hoping and praying she would come. They had been pining for her to be there, in charge: the mistress, "his" wife. Ah, "his" wife!

"His" wife. His halo was like a bucket over her head.

The cook-mother was of the people, so it was the upper-maid daughter who came for orders.

"What will you order for tomorrow's lunch and dinner, Mrs. Gee?"

"Well, what do you usually have?"

"Oh, we want *you* to say."

"No, what do you *usually* have?"

"We don't have anything fixed. Mother goes out and

chooses the best she can find, that is nice and fresh. But she thought you would tell her now what to get."

"Oh, I don't know! I'm not very good at that sort of thing. Ask her to go on just the same; I'm quite sure she knows best."

"Perhaps you'd like to suggest a sweet?"

"No, I don't care for sweets—and you know Mr. Gee doesn't. So don't make one for me."

Could anything be more impossible! They had the house spotless and running like a dream; how could an incompetent and extravagant wife dare to interfere, when she saw their amazing and almost inspired economy! But they ran the place on simply nothing!

Simply marvellous people! And the way they strewed palm-branches under her feet!

But that only made her feel ridiculous.

"Don't you think the family manage very well?" he asked her tentatively.

"Awfully well! Almost romantically well," she replied. "But I suppose you're perfectly happy?"

"I'm perfectly comfortable," he replied.

"I can see you are," she replied. "Amazingly so! I never knew such comfort! Are you sure it isn't bad for you?"

She eyed him stealthily. He looked very well, and extremely handsome, in his histrionic way. He was shockingly well-dressed and valeted. And he had that air of easy *aplomb* and good humour which is so becoming to a man, and which he only acquires when he is cock of his own little walk, made much of by his own hens.

"No!" he said, taking his pipe from his mouth and smiling whimsically round at her. "Do I look as if it were bad for me?"

"No, you don't," she replied promptly: thinking, naturally, as a woman is supposed to think nowadays, of his health and comfort, the foundation, apparently, of all happiness.

Then, of course, away she went on the backwash.

"Perhaps for your work, though, it's not so good as it is for *you*," she said in a rather small voice. She knew he couldn't bear it if she mocked at his work for one moment. And he knew that rather small voice of hers.

"In what way?" he said, bristles rising.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered indifferently. "Perhaps it's not good for a man's work if he is too comfortable."

"I don't know about *that*!" he said, taking a dramatic turn

round the library and drawing at his pipe. "Considering I work, actually, by the clock, for twelve hours a day, and for ten hours when it's a short day, I don't think you can say I am deteriorating from easy comfort."

"No, I suppose not," she admitted.

Yet she did think it, nevertheless. His comfortableness didn't consist so much in good food and a soft bed, as in having nobody, absolutely nobody and nothing to contradict him.

"I do like to think he's got nothing to aggravate him," the secretary had said to the wife.

"Nothing to aggravate him." What a position for a man! Fostered by women who would let nothing "aggravate" him. If anything would aggravate his wounded vanity, this would.

So thought the wife. But what was to be done about it? In the silence of midnight she heard his voice in the distance, dictating away, like the voice of God to Samuel, alone and monotonous, and she imagined the little figure of the secretary busily scribbling shorthand. Then in the sunny hours of morning, while he was still in bed—he never rose till noon—from another distance came that sharp insect-noise of the typewriter, like some immense grasshopper chirping and rattling. It was the secretary, poor thing, typing out his notes.

That girl—she was only twenty-eight—really slaved herself to skin and bone. She was small and neat, but she was actually worn out. She did far more work than he did, for she had not only to take down all those words he uttered, she had to type them out, make three copies, while he was still resting.

What on earth she gets out of it, thought the wife, I don't know. She's simply worn to the bone, for a very poor salary, and he's never kissed her, and never will, if I know anything about him.

Whether his never kissing her—the secretary, that is—made it worse or better, the wife did not decide. He never kissed anybody. Whether she herself—the wife, that is—wanted to be kissed by him, even that she was not clear about. She rather thought she didn't.

What on earth did she want then? She was his wife. What on earth did she want of him?

She certainly didn't want to take him down in shorthand and type out again all those words. And she didn't really want him to kiss her; she knew him too well. Yes, she knew

him too well. If you know a man too well, you don't want him to kiss you.

What then? What did she want? Why had she such an extraordinary hang-over about him? Just because she was his wife? Why did she rather "enjoy" other men—and she was relentless about enjoyment—without ever taking them seriously? And why must she take him so damn seriously, when she never really "enjoyed" him?

Of course she *had* had good times with him, in the past, before—ah! before a thousand things, all amounting really to nothing. But she enjoyed him no more. She never even enjoyed being with him. There was a silent, ceaseless tension between them, that never broke, even when they were a thousand miles apart.

Awful! That's what you call being married! What's to be done about it? Ridiculous, to know it all and not do anything about it!

She came back once more; and there she was, in her own house, a sort of super-guest, even to him. And the secretarial family devoting their lives to him.

Devoting their lives to him! But actually! Three women pouring out their lives for him day and night. And what did they get in return? Not one kiss! Very little money, because they knew all about his debts, and had made it their life-business to get them paid off. No expectations! Twelve hours' work a day. Comparative isolation, for he saw nobody.

And beyond that? Nothing! Perhaps a sense of uplift and importance because they saw his name and photograph in the newspapers sometimes. But would anybody believe that it was good enough?

Yet they adored it! They seemed to get a deep satisfaction out of it, like people with a mission. Extraordinary!

Well, if they did, let them. They were, of course, rather common, of the people; there might be a sort of glamour in it for them.

But it was bad for him. No doubt about it. His work was getting diffuse and poor in quality—and what wonder! His whole tone was going down—becoming commoner. Of course it was bad for him.

Being his wife, she felt she ought to do something to save him. But how could she? That perfectly devoted, marvellous secretarial family, how could she make an attack on them? Yet she'd love to sweep them into oblivion. Of

course they were bad for him: ruining his work, ruining his reputation as a writer, ruining his life. Ruining him with their slavish service.

Of course she ought to make an onslaught on them! But how *could* she? Such devotion! And what had she herself to offer in their place? Certainly not slavish devotion to him, nor to his flow of words. Certainly not!

She imagined him stripped once more naked of secretary and secretarial family, and she shuddered. It was like throwing the naked baby in the dustbin. Couldn't do that!

Yet something must be done. She felt it. She was almost tempted to get into debt for another thousand pounds, and send in the bill, or have it sent in to him, as usual.

But no! Something more drastic.

Something more drastic, or perhaps more gentle. She wavered between the two. And wavering, she first did nothing, came to no decision, dragged vacantly on from day to day, waiting for sufficient energy to take her departure once more.

It was spring. What a fool she had been to come up in spring! And she was forty. What an idiot of a woman to go and be forty!

She went down the garden in the warm afternoon, when birds were whistling loudly from the cover, the sky being low and warm, and she had nothing to do. The garden was full of flowers: he loved them for their theatrical display. Lilac and snowball bushes, and laburnum and red may, tulips and anemones and coloured daisies. Lots of flowers! Borders of forget-me-nots. Bachelor's buttons. What absurd names flowers had! She would have called them blue dots and yellow blobs and white frills. Not so much sentiment, after all!

There is a certain nonsense, something showy and stagey about spring, with its pushing leaves and chorus-girl flowers, unless you have something corresponding inside you. Which she hadn't.

Oh, heaven! Beyond the hedge she heard a voice, a steady rather theatrical voice. Oh, heaven! He was dictating to his secretary in the garden. Good God, was there nowhere to get away from it!

She looked around: there was indeed plenty of escape. But what was the good of escaping? He would go on and on. She went quietly towards the hedge, and listened.

He was dictating a magazine article about the modern

novel. "What the modern novel lacks is architecture." Good God, architecture! He might just as well say, What the modern novel lacks is whalebone, or a teaspoon, or a tooth stopped.

Yet the secretary took it down, took it down, took it down! No, this could not go on! It was more than flesh and blood could bear.

She went quietly along the hedge, somewhat wolf-like in her prowl, a broad, strong woman in an expensive mustard-coloured silk jersey and cream-coloured pleated skirt. Her legs were long and shapely, and her shoes were expensive.

With a curious wolf-like stealth she turned the hedge and looked across at the small, shaded lawn where the daisies grew impertinently. "He" was reclining in a coloured hammock under the pink-flowering horse-chestnut tree, dressed in white serge with a fine yellow-coloured linen shirt. His elegant hand dropped over the side of the hammock and beat a sort of vague rhythm to his words. At a little wicker table the little secretary, in a green knitted frock, bent her dark head over her notebook, and diligently made those awful shorthand marks. He was not difficult to take down, as he dictated slowly, and kept a sort of rhythm, beating time with his dangling hand.

"In every novel there must be one outstanding character with which we always sympathise—with *whom* we always sympathise—even though we recognise its—even when we are most aware of the human frailties—"

Every man his own hero, thought the wife grimly, forgetting that every woman is intensely her own heroine.

But what did startle her was a blue bird dashing about near the feet of the absorbed, shorthand-scribbling little secretary. At least it was a blue-tit, blue with grey and some yellow. But to the wife it seemed blue, that juicy spring day, in the translucent afternoon. The blue bird, fluttering round the pretty but rather *common* little feet of the little secretary.

The blue bird! The blue bird of happiness! Well, I'm blest— thought the wife. Well, I'm blest!

And as she was being blest, appeared another blue bird—that is, another blue-tit—and began to wrestle with the first blue-tit. A couple of blue birds of happiness, having a fight over it! Well, I'm blest!

She was more or less out of sight of the human preoccupied pair. But "he" was disturbed by the fighting blue birds, whose little feathers began to float loose.

"Get out," he said to them mildly, waving a dark-yellow handkerchief at them. "Fight your little fight, and settle your private affairs elsewhere, my dear little gentlemen."

The little secretary looked up quickly, for she had already begun to write it down. He smiled at her his twisted whimsical smile.

"No, don't take that down," he said affectionately. "Did you see those two tits laying into one another?"

"No!" said the little secretary, gazing brightly round, her eyes half-blinded with work.

But she saw the queer, powerful, elegant, wolf-like figure of the wife, behind her, and terror came into her eyes.

"I did!" said the wife, stepping forward with those curious, shapely, she-wolf legs of hers, under the very short skirt.

"Aren't they extraordinarily vicious little beasts?" said he.

"Extraordinarily!" she re-echoed, stooping and picking up a little breast-feather. "Extraordinarily! See how the feathers fly!"

And she got the feather on the tip of her finger, and looked at it. Then she looked at the secretary, then she looked at him. She had a queer, were-wolf expression between her brows.

"I think," he began, "these are the loveliest afternoons, when there's no direct sun, but all the sounds and the colours and the scents are sort of dissolved, don't you know, in the air, and the whole thing is steeped, steeped in spring. It's like being on the inside; you know how I mean, like being inside the egg and just ready to chip the shell."

"Quite like that," she assented, without conviction.

There was a little pause. The secretary said nothing. They were waiting for the wife to depart again.

"I suppose," said the latter, "you're awfully busy, as usual?"

"Just about the same," he said, pursing his mouth deprecatingly.

Again the blank pause, in which he waited for her to go away again.

"I know I'm interrupting you," she said.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was just watching those two blue-tits."

"Pair of little demons!" said the wife, blowing away the yellow feather from her finger-tip.

"Absolutely!" he said.

"Well, I'd better go, and let you get on with your work," she said.

"No hurry," he said, with benevolent nonchalance. "As a matter of fact, I don't think it's a great success, working out of doors."

"What made you try it?" said the wife. "You know you never could do it."

"Miss Wrexall suggested it might make a change. But I don't think it altogether helps, do you, Miss Wrexall?"

"I'm sorry," said the little secretary.

"Why should *you* be sorry?" said the wife, looking down at her as a wolf might look down half-benignly at a little black-and-tan mongrel. "You only suggested it for his good, I'm sure!"

"I thought the air might be good for him," the secretary admitted.

"Why do people like you never think about yourselves?" the wife asked.

The secretary looked her in the eye.

"I suppose we do, in a different way," she said.

"A *very* different way!" said the wife ironically. "Why don't you make *him* think about *you*?" she added, slowly, with a sort of drawl. "On a soft spring afternoon like this, you ought to have him dictating poems to you, about the blue birds of happiness fluttering round your dainty little feet. I know *I* would, if I were his secretary."

There was a dead pause. The wife stood immobile and statuesque, in an attitude characteristic of her, half turning back to the little secretary, half averted. She half turned her back on everything.

The secretary looked at him.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was doing an article on The Future of the Novel."

"I know that," said the wife. "That's what's so awful! Why not something lively in the life of the novelist?"

There was a prolonged silence, in which he looked pained, and somewhat remote, statuesque. The little secretary hung her head. The wife sauntered slowly away.

"Just where were we, Miss Wrexall?" came the sound of his voice.

The little secretary started. She was feeling profoundly indignant. Their beautiful relationship, his and hers, to be so insulted!

But soon she was veering downstream on the flow of his

words, too busy to have any feelings, except one of elation at being so busy.

Teatime came; the sister brought out the tea-tray into the garden. And immediately, the wife appeared. She had changed, and was wearing a chicory-blue dress of fine cloth. The little secretary had gathered up her papers and was departing, on rather high heels.

"Don't go, Miss Wrexall," said the wife.

The little secretary stopped short, then hesitated.

"Mother will be expecting me," she said.

"Tell her you're not coming. And ask your sister to bring another cup. I want you to have tea with us."

Miss Wrexall looked at the man, who was reared on one elbow in the hammock, and was looking enigmatical, Hamletish.

He glanced at her quickly, then pursed his mouth in a boyish negligence.

"Yes, stay and have tea with us for once," he said. "I see strawberries, and I know you're the bird for them."

She glanced at him, smiled wanly, and hurried away to tell her mother. She even stayed long enough to slip on a silk dress.

"Why, how smart you are!" said the wife, when the little secretary reappeared on the lawn, in chicory-blue silk.

"Oh, don't look at my dress, compared to yours!" said Miss Wrexall. They were of the same colour, indeed!

"At least you earned yours, which is more than I did mine," said the wife, as she poured tea. "You like it strong?"

She looked with her heavy eyes at the smallish, birdy, blue-clad, overworked young woman, and her eyes seemed to speak many inexplicable dark volumes.

"Oh, as it comes, thank you," said Miss Wrexall, leaning nervously forward.

"It's coming pretty black, if you want to ruin your digestion," said the wife.

"Oh, I'll have some water in it, then."

"Better, I should say."

"How'd the work go—all right?" asked the wife, as they drank tea, and the two women looked at each other's blue dresses.

"Oh!" he said. "As well as you can expect. It was a piece of pure flummery. But it's what they want. Awful rot, wasn't it, Miss Wrexall?"

Miss Wrexall moved uneasily on her chair.

"It interested me," she said, "though not so much as the novel."

"The novel? Which novel?" said the wife. "Is there another new one?"

Miss Wrexall looked at him. Not for words would she give away any of his literary activities.

"Oh, I was just sketching out an idea to Miss Wrexall," he said.

"Tell us about it!" said the wife. "Miss Wrexall, *you* tell us what it's about."

She turned on her chair, and fixed the little secretary.

"I'm afraid—" Miss Wrexall squirmed—"I haven't got it very clearly myself, yet."

"Oh, go along! Tell us what you *have* got then!"

Miss Wrexall sat dumb and very vexed. She felt she was being baited. She looked at the blue pleatings of her skirt.

"I'm afraid I can't," she said.

"Why are you afraid you can't? You're so *very* competent. I'm sure you've got it all at your fingerends. I expect you write a good deal of Mr. Gee's books for him, really. He gives you the hint, and you fill it all in. Isn't that how you do it?" She spoke ironically, and as if she were teasing a child. And then she glanced down at the fine pleatings of her own blue skirt, very fine and expensive.

"Of course you're not speaking seriously?" said Miss Wrexall, rising on her mettle.

"Of course I am! I've suspected for a long time—at least, for some time—that you write a good deal of Mr. Gee's books for him, from his hints."

It was said in a tone of raillery, but it was cruel.

"I should be terribly flattered," said Miss Wrexall, straightening herself, "if I didn't know you were only trying to make me feel a fool."

"Make you feel a fool? My dear child!—why, nothing could be farther from me! You're twice as clever, and a million times as competent as I am. Why, my dear child, I've the greatest admiration for you! I wouldn't do what you do, not for all the pearls in India. I *couldn't,* anyhow—"

Miss Wrexall closed up and was silent.

"Do you mean to say my books read as if—?" he began, rearing up and speaking in a harrowed voice.

"I do!" said the wife. "*Just* as if Miss Wrexall had written them from your hints. I *honestly* thought she did—when you were too busy—"

"How very clever of you!" he said.

"Very!" she cried. "Especially if I was wrong!"

"Which you were," he said.

"How very extraordinary!" she cried. "Well, I am once more mistaken!"

There was a complete pause.

It was broken by Miss Wrexall, who was nervously twisting her fingers.

"You want to spoil what there is between me and him, I can see that," she said bitterly.

"My dear, but what *is* there between you and him?" asked the wife.

"I was *happy* working with him, working for him! I was *happy* working for him!" cried Miss Wrexall, tears of indignant anger and chagrin in her eyes.

"My dear child!" cried the wife, with simulated excitement, "go *on* being happy working with him, go on being happy while you can. If it makes you happy, why then, enjoy it! Of course! Do you think I'd be so cruel as to want to take it away from you—working with him? *I* can't do shorthand and typewriting and double-entrance book-keeping, or whatever it's called. I tell you, I'm utterly incompetent. I never earn anything. I'm the parasite on the British oak, like the mistletoe. The blue bird doesn't flutter round my feet. Perhaps they're too big and trampling."

She looked down at her expensive shoes.

"If I *did* have a word of criticism to offer," she said, turning to her husband, "it would be to you, Cameron, for taking so much from her and giving her nothing."

"But he gives me everything, everything!" cried Miss Wrexall. "He gives me everything!"

"What do you mean by everything?" said the wife, turning on her sternly.

Miss Wrexall pulled up short. There was a snap in the air, and a change of currents.

"I mean nothing that *you* need begrudge me," said the little secretary rather haughtily. "I've never made myself cheap."

There was a blank pause.

"My God!" said the wife. "You don't call that being cheap? Why, I should say you got nothing out of him at all, you only give. And if you don't call that making yourself cheap—my God!"

"You see, we see things different," said the secretary.

"I should say we do—*thank God!*" rejoined the wife.

"On whose behalf are you thanking God?" he asked sarcastically.

"Everybody's, I suppose! Yours, because you get everything for nothing, and Miss Wrexall's, because she seems to like it, and mine because I'm well out of it all."

"You *needn't* be out of it all," cried Miss Wrexall magnanimously, "if you didn't *put* yourself out of it all."

"Thank you, my dear, for your offer," said the wife, rising. "But I'm afraid no man can expect *two* blue birds of happiness to flutter round his feet, tearing out their little feathers!"

With which she walked away.

After a tense and desperate interim, Miss Wrexall cried, "And *really*, need any woman be jealous of *me*?"

"Quite!" he said.

And that was all he did say.

"Captain, I hate to disturb you. But about an hour ago my wife fell overboard."

A Suit For LUCY'S PARTY

He'd forgotten all right—forgotten the most important thing in my life

I PARKED the car outside Belton & Fogg's, and the three of us got out. Three generations—my father, my son, myself. The shop was still imposing in a discreet, old-fashioned sort of way. Unless you knew, you couldn't tell it had gone down in the world.

"Well," I said to the old man, "recognise the place?"

"I recognise it," he said, "now let's go. This foolishness . . ."

I took his arm. "We've waited twenty-five years for this," I said. "Come on."

The three of us went in, and after a while the cutter came forward, and it was the same one all right. Twenty-five years older, but the same one, rubbing his hands, hissing a little.

"What can I have the pleasure . . .?"

"Can you make three suits in four days?"

"I beg your pardon, sir—three suits—"

"In four days. For my father, my son and myself."

Twenty-five years had slowed his reactions down. He looked round at us in turn, bewildered.

"You've done it before," I said. "Just say if you can't manage."

"But yes, sir. Certainly it can be arranged." His hands were going again, and there was an anxious look in his eye. "It was the unexpectedness . . ." He snapped his fingers for one of the fitters.

I sat and watched him measuring the old man and the boy, and it was very satisfying. Then it was my turn. His eyes kept flickering at me as the tape measure went round.

"Did you say we'd had the pleasure of making suits for you before, sir?"

"Well," I said, "not exactly." And for the life of me, I

by Lionel Davidson

couldn't keep my face straight, even though I'd rehearsed this moment, dwelt on it for weeks. I turned away, and in the mirror the cutter's triangular, foxy little face was reflected for a moment, thrust forward a little, exactly as it had been when he'd held on to the parcel that day twenty-five years before...

There was a depression on then, and my old man was a depressed master tailor, forced into soliciting work from the high-class establishments.

Once a week he went to Belton & Fogg's, then the most exclusive tailors in town. I went with him one day during the school holidays. The cutter looked up as we came in. "You're the fifth today," he said shortly. "The place is beginning to look like a soup kitchen. There's no point in coming in—I'll send for you if there's anything."

The tone of his voice turned my old man's face an angry white, but just then the wall telephone rang. The cutter turned to it, and my old man took my arm. "Come on, son," he said, and we went out. We were a few yards down the street when one of the fitters ran to the doorway, snapping his fingers. We went back. The cutter was still at the phone.

"Yes, my lord. With the greatest of pleasure. Please leave everything to us. Not the least bit of trouble... Thank you, my lord."

He hung up, snarling. "Kincallon—that young snotty nose. We'd have kept him waiting three months for a suit in the normal way. A minimum of three months. Now he must have three—three—in four days. This is what the country's come to." He saw us waiting. "Well," he said, "stay on a bit. You can take the three coats."

He looked up the young nobleman's measurements and thumbed through his patterns and sent up to the stockroom for three bolts of cloth. And then he had to send up again. My father was out of padding. The fine woollen padding for the front of a coat was expensive and rationed out sparingly. The exact length of each piece given to the coat-maker was booked out, and any left over was either returned or kept for the next coat. My father took three yards.

The cutter worked quickly and angrily and superbly, and the cut-outs and the padding were packed. My old man reached out for the parcel. The cutter kept his hands on it, his little foxy face calculating.

"There's just one thing," he said. "Business is very slow. Our overheads go on. It'll have to be five shillings less each

coat." And before my father could answer he added, "Believe me, I've got a list of coat-makers as long as your arm, begging me for work. Just say if—"

"All right," my father said. His lips were pursed and his face was closed, and right away I knew I was doomed. He had forgotten. But how could he have forgotten? Surely it wasn't possible . . .

We didn't speak on the way home, and he went into his workroom the minute we arrived. He worked right through dinner, and I took him in sandwiches. His face was grey, he was stitching with sullen concentration, and he just nodded to me. He'd forgotten all right; forgotten the most important thing in my life. And there was no reminding him now.

In two days, Lucy Manfred was having a party. I loved Lucy, loved her almost to distraction. I imagined myself in the most romantic situations with her, like throwing myself in front of a motor car to save her, or saying to a bully: "Stand out of this young lady's path at once!" Nothing like that had come up so far. In fact, I hardly knew her. My old man had once made her old man a suit, that was all. But now, against all reason, she had invited me to her party. And I didn't have a suit to go in.

In the past year, I had worn into my best suit. My old man had merely altered it from time to time to suit my growing requirements. I had mentioned it to him, nervously, knowing the financial circumstances, and some of my desperation must have come through. He had smiled and said he would look around for a piece of stuff. He was supposed to have looked around that morning. And he had forgotten!

In despair, I must have stood there for a minute or two, holding the plate of sandwiches. He said irritably, "Don't stand over me. Put the plate down." And then he looked up.

The tears were streaming slowly down my cheeks.

He began to say, "What's the matter—?" And then he stopped, remembering what was the matter. He put his work down, his mouth open, and his face seemed to grow greyer.

"What can I do, son? You heard what he said. Three coats in four days. It's not possible . . ."

Through my tears, I said, "It's all right . . ."

"Maybe . . ." he said. But he didn't say maybe what. There was no maybe. I ran out, up to my own room, face down on the bed, sobbing. There would be plenty of other boys at Lucy Manfred's party. She'd hardly notice my absence.

Two days later, I went up to town with the parcel for the first fitting, hating Belton & Fogg and the cutter and Lord Kincallon. My father stayed to work on the third coat, which wasn't ready. He had been up half the night with a morning coat. I travelled up in an old pair of shorts and a jersey. Dad had told me to leave out my suit the night before to see what he could do with it.

Kincallon was already there, a beautiful young woman with him. The cutter was fawning on them both. He snatched the parcel from my hands, and in a minute or two, Kincallon was standing in front of the mirror with the uncompleted morning coat on, joking with the girl. It seemed they were going to a Royal garden party and they were engaged to be married, and for both functions Kincallon needed the morning coat. I hated him more intensely than ever. Half a dozen people, myself included, were worrying to see that he got to his party in a fine new suit. No-one would lift a hand to see that I got one.

I was so cynically sure of this that when I got home with the parcel and my old man said, "Don't worry, you'll go to your party," my heart gave a wild leap.

His eyes were sunk in his head, his face unshaven. "I sponged and pressed the suit," he said, and the ghost of a smile crossed his face. "Don't worry about it."

"Thank you," I said, cynically. You could sponge and press that old suit for a week and it would still look what it was. I wasn't going to disgrace myself by wearing it at a party. Not at Lucy's party.

But I went to the party, all the same...

I thought I'd got control of my face now, and turned to look at the cutter. It was a mistake. The little foxy face brought it back to me so clearly that for a moment I was helpless in the spasm of nervous laughter. The old man sitting up that night with the morning coat, carefully sponging and pressing my terrible old suit, carefully cutting it up and sewing it into Kincallon's suits, carefully making me a new suit out of the fine woollen padding...

It had been a beautifully economical gesture of reassurance to a boy whose pride was imperilled—of contempt for an employer who cut a craftsman's rate when work was scarce. *There's just one thing*, the cutter had said, *it'll have to be five shillings less each coat.* Take it or leave it, knowing he needed the work. Now Belton & Fogg's needed work...

I buttoned up my coat and the cutter began rubbing his hands again.

"There's just one thing," I said.

"Ah, no," my father said. He'd been watching me anxiously from his chair, and now he came forward as though driven by a spring. "Forget that. It's over and done with."

"There's just one thing," I said again to the cutter, but smiling at my old man. "I want you to add to the bill the cost of three yards of padding twenty-five years ago."

The cutter goggled at me. "I'm afraid—I'm afraid I don't understand, sir."

"You don't have to understand," I said. "Just put it on the bill and I'll pay it." And then the three of us went out and joined my wife in the car.

"Well," Lucy said, "can I come in on it now? What are you all grinning about?"

"Just settling an old score, dear," I said, and swung out. "And fixing up a little surprise for your party."

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THE OLD POLE STAR

Ted went first in the Lunar I,
He aimed for the moon, but he fell in the sun.
He fried, man, he fried.

So Joe went up in the Lunar II,
His aim was better, but he went right through.
He died, man, he died.

The Lunar III was next in the row,
But Arthur's wife wouldn't let him go.
He cried, man, he cried.

So I went up in the Lunar III,
And all the statesmen waved at me.
In pride, man, in pride.

But I went too fast and I went too far,
And here I sit on the old Pole Star.
Still I tried, man, I tried.

IVOR C. F. TREBY

THE LAST TIME I SAW RAYMOND CHANDLER

by Lawrence Hammond

IT WAS one of those anonymous houses in St. John's Wood, modestly sedate and everything in its place, so that you found yourself lowering your voice when the landlady at last opened the front door and you asked if this was where Mr. Chandler was living.

You were sorry to trouble her, and as you followed her through the small hallway you glanced around and thought of the patios and pools of Los Angeles and Palm Springs which were the lush hunting-grounds of Philip Marlowe.

"In here," she said, and left you at an open door, and you stepped into a room that seemed all bed. Although it was only four in the afternoon, not much light came through the drawn curtains and you couldn't see anywhere to put your raincoat, which was suddenly very large and in the way.

The bedclothes heaved, and he leaned on an elbow while he pushed up the pillows, then slumped back against them and said you might find room on the armchair for your coat, and if you pulled back the curtains there might be enough light to see each other.

The voice was deep and slow and gentle, and rather tired, and the accent was hard to place. Almost, but not quite, American. It might have been Canadian, but in fact it was the result of an English upbringing, schooling at Dulwich College and a year in the Gordon Highlanders in the '14-'18 war, overlaid by nearly forty years of life in the United States.

"I'm sorry to receive you like this," he said, and looked

around the room and moved an arm wearily. "I don't somehow feel like getting out of bed."

His face was unshaved and his pyjamas seemed too large. He reached to a shelf beside the bed for his glasses, brown hornrims. Alongside them on the shelf, in easy reach, were a large photograph of an extremely beautiful woman and a bottle of whisky that had taken some punishment.

I pulled up a wooden chair beside the bed, and he suddenly remembered that he had asked me to tea: he wasn't too conscious of the clock just now (there wasn't one in the room), but after all, this was London and it was after four. The landlady would be bringing me a cup, he guessed, but if I didn't mind he'd take something a little stronger.

No, I wouldn't join him: it was a little early for me, and his eyes smiled sadly back at me through the tops of his glasses, and all the little lines spread down over his cheekbones, very fine and very many of them, and you realised that once he would have had a wry answer to that, and he'd thought of one now, but didn't feel like saying it out loud. There'd been a time when it had been a little early for him too, and it seemed a long while ago, and we both knew it, and he'd made all the wry answers, and what was the point.

He reached for the whisky bottle and the glass, which meant that he had to look at the photograph of the woman alongside them, and he looked at it for a long time. Then he poured the whisky and drank a little, not very much, and put down the glass and said: "That was my wife. She died. She was ill a long time. Two years. I nursed her myself. It's a terrible thing when someone's in pain. I loved her very much. We were married thirty years."

I said I was sorry, and he said: "I can't get over it. We were always together. I've no home without her. There's my house in California, but it's empty. That's why I came over to London, I guess. A home's not the same when it's without the woman you've been with all the time. We loved each other. She was a wonderful woman."

I knew that some time after Cecily died, when the numbness passed and the pain of sorrow was unbearable, Chandler had taken a revolver into the bathroom of the empty Californian house. He put the gun to his temple and pulled the trigger. He pulled it twice. Nothing happened. The ammunition was old, damp. Chandler stood there, in a worn dressing-gown, and reflected that suicide was tragedy, but an unsuccessful attempt at suicide was just a farce.

I knew this, but we did not speak of it that afternoon in St. John's Wood. Instead, I asked him if it helped to be able to work. He laughed shortly. "I'm working on a new book. I've been working on it two years. I keep throwing it away and starting again. I'm never satisfied."

"How far has it got?"

He nodded towards an open typewriter and a pile of paper. "About halfway now. But I think I'll start it over again."

He always wrote ten times more than he allowed to be published, and what was published was ten times as good as anyone else in his field has ever written.

He drank some more whisky, and we both lit fresh cigarettes and made the smoky air even thicker, and he said: "Sometimes I doubt that the book will ever get finished."

It never did get finished. Many months later, I read as much as he had written. It was called *The Poodle Springs Story*, and opened in a fabulous house with decorative butterflies imprisoned in the plate-glass walls, a palm tree in the inside patio which led to the pool which led to the outside patio, pink carpeting up to your ankles, and a Hollywood bed that looked as big as a tennis court. When I read it, I seemed to see again the man with the broad, strong, but so-weary face, sitting up in the bed in his room in the London suburb, and drinking his teatime whisky, his eyes constantly moving back to the picture of his dead wife.

I ought not to have been surprised when I found that in *The Poodle Springs Story*, Philip Marlowe, hitherto the indestructible bachelor, had married. She was a multi-millionairess and her name was Linda, and they were as close as two people can get. Marlowe wasn't working, although he wanted to be. But he had a wife.

Chandler once said: "I suppose Marlowe really is a secret me. We're both lonely, sentimental, cynical, and we're both incorruptible."

The private eye and his creator did share all those qualities, but in other respects they were the reverse of the same coin. Marlowe was tough, violent, wisecracking; Chandler was tender, sensitive, hating all violence and cruelty.

Marlowe was the never-doubting man of instant action: Chandler was the introspective, self-doubting writer, constantly demanding of himself a professional perfectionism that his books came as close to achieving as it is possible to get.

Marlowe was violent, but never sadistic—and I recommend the thought to all James Bond fans. He lived with the smell

of fear, in a world where—as Chandler said—the streets were dark with something more than night.

Raymond Chandler's room, on the day of which I write, was dark with something more than the London dusk. Chandler was tired with more than fatigue. His book was bogged down by more than the dissatisfied perfectionism of a supreme craftsman. Something had gone out of his life, and he couldn't replace it; did not want to try to replace it.

He never again tried to take his life after that day in California. He moved out of the room in St. John's Wood and into the Ritz Hotel and later into a Chelsea flat—he had plenty of money, and good friends in London. But to me it seemed that it no longer really mattered to him where he lived. Nothing very much mattered very much any more.

We talked for quite a time and then he suggested, kindly, that we had probably talked enough for one afternoon and I got up to go. When I looked back from the door, he had already pushed himself back under the bedclothes, and his face was towards the photograph on the shelf. I never saw him again.

Months later I read that Raymond Chandler had died.

© Lawrence Hammond 1965

Raymond Chandler died six years ago. But this summer there is a reawakening of the Chandler cult in Britain with the publication of a new collection of some of his finest work.

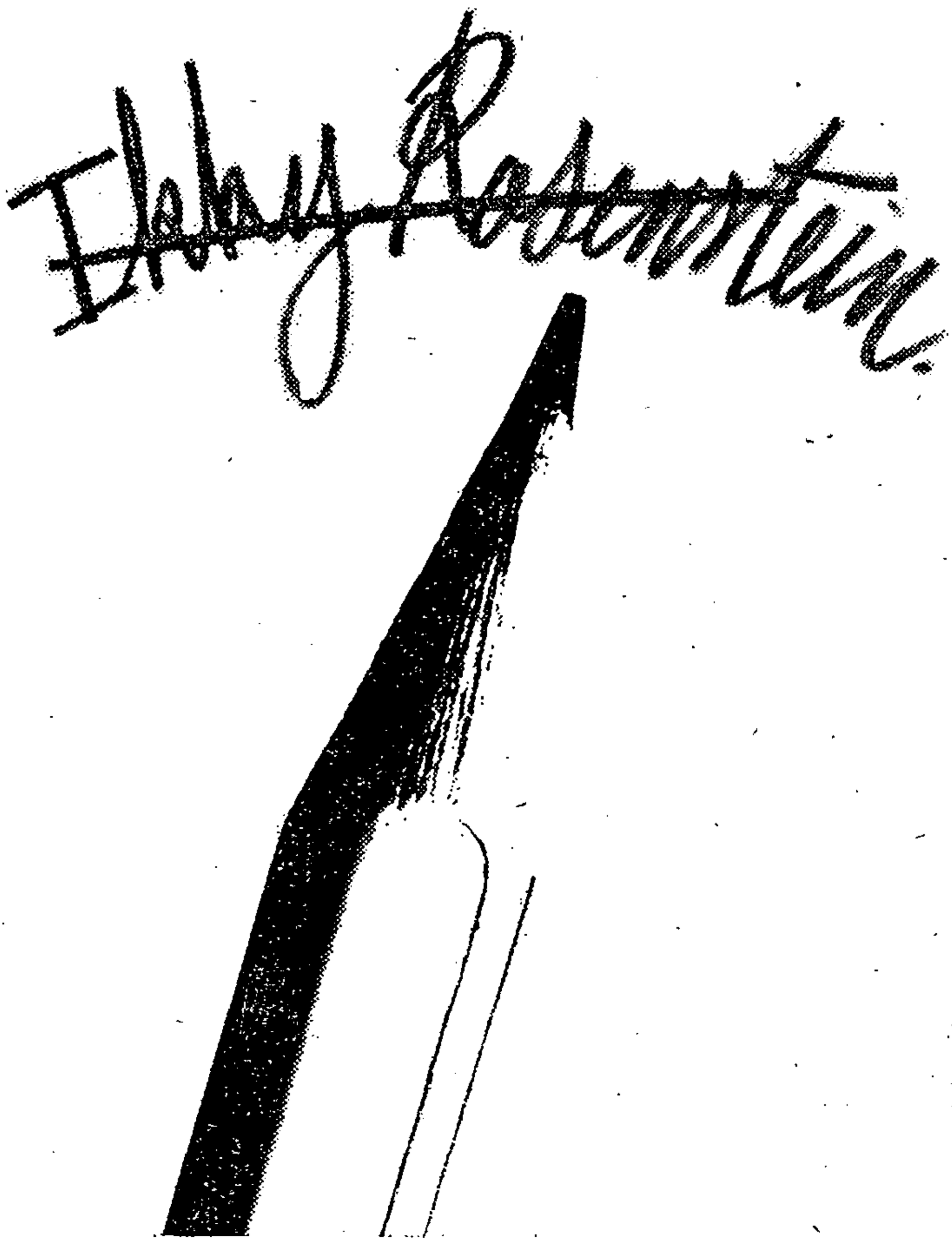
It includes the last short story he ever wrote. It was also the first Philip Marlowe short story that he had produced in twenty years.

Chandler had persistently refused to write short stories, because he thought books were his natural element. He was persuaded to write this one by friends in England, and he did so because he had always wanted to tackle a story about the murder technique of the Syndicate, America's huge crime organisation.

The result was a brilliant story. It has never before appeared in a British magazine. It begins on the next page.

THE PENCIL

RAYMOND CHANDLER



HE was a slightly fat man with a dishonest smile that pulled the corners of his mouth out half an inch leaving the thick lips tight and his eyes bleak. For a fattish man he had a slow walk. Most fat men are brisk and light on their feet. He wore a grey herringbone suit and a hand-painted tie with part of a diving girl visible on it. His shirt was clean, which comforted me, and his brown loafers, as wrong as the tie for his suit, shone from a recent polishing.

He sidled past me as I held the door between the waiting room and my thinking parlour. Once inside, he took a quick look around. I'd have placed him as a mobster, second grade, if I had been asked. For once I was right. If he carried a gun, it was inside his pants. His coat was too tight to hide the bulge of an underarm holster.

He sat down carefully and I sat opposite and we looked at each other. His face had a sort of foxy eagerness. He was sweating a little. The expression on my face was meant to be interested but not clubby. I reached for a pipe and the leather pouch in which I kept my tobacco. I pushed cigarettes at him.

"I don't smoke." He had a rusty voice. I didn't like it any more than I liked his clothes, or his face. While I filled the pipe he reached inside his coat, prowled in a pocket, came out with a bill, glanced at it and dropped it across the desk in front of me. It was a nice bill and clean and new. One thousand dollars.

"Ever save a guy's life?"

"Once in a while, maybe."

"Save mine."

"What goes?"

"I heard you levelled with the customers, Marlowe."

"That's why I stay poor."

"I still got two friends. You make it three and you'll be out of the red. You got five grand coming if you pry me loose."

"From what?"

"You're talkative as hell this morning. Don't you pipe who I am?"

"Nope."

"Never been east, huh?"

"Sure—but I wasn't in your set."

"What set would that be?"

I was getting tired of it. "Stop being so goddam cagey or pick up your grand and be missing."

"I'm Ikky Rosenstein. I'll be missing but good unless you can figure some out. Guess."

"I've already guessed. You tell me and tell me quick. I don't have all day to watch you feeding me with an eye-dropper."

"I ran out on the Outfit. The high boys don't go for that. To them it means you got info you figure you can peddle, or you got independent ideas, or you lost your moxie. Me, I lost my moxie. I had it up to here." He touched his Adam's apple with the forefinger of a stretched hand. "I done bad things. I scared and hurt guys. I never killed nobody. That's nothing to the Outfit. I'm out of line. So they pick up the pencil and they draw a line. I got the word. The operators are on the way. I made a bad mistake. I tried to hole up in Vegas. I figured they'd never expect me to lie up in their own joint. They outfigured me. What I did's been done before, but I didn't know it. When I took the plane to Los Angeles there must have been somebody on it. They know where I live."

"Move."

"No good now. I'm covered." I knew he was right.

"Why haven't they taken care of you already?"

"They don't do it that way. Always specialists. Don't you know how it works?"

"More or less. A guy with a nice hardware store in Buffalo. A guy with a small dairy in Kansas City. Always a good front. They report back to New York or somewhere. When they mount the plane west or wherever they're going, they have guns in their briefcases. They're quiet and well-dressed and they don't sit together. They could be a couple of lawyers or income tax sharpies—anything at all that's well-mannered and inconspicuous. All sorts of people carry briefcases. Including women."

"Correct as hell. And when they land they'll be steered to me, but not from the airfield. They got ways. If I go to the cops, somebody will know about me. They could have a couple Mafia boys right on the City Council for all I know. It's been done. The cops will give me twenty-four hours to leave town. No use. Mexico? Worse than here. Canada? Better but still no good. Connections there too."

"Australia?"

"Can't get a passport. I been here twenty-five years—illegal. They can't deport me unless they can prove a crime on me. The Outfit would see they didn't. Suppose I got

tossed into the freezer. I'm out on a writ in twenty-four hours. And my nice friends got a car waiting to take me home —only not home."

I had my pipe lit and going well. I frowned down at the grand note. I could use it very nicely. My savings account could kiss the sidewalk without stooping.

"Let's stop horsing," I said. "Suppose—just suppose—I could figure an out for you. What's your next move?"

"I know a place—if I could get there without bein' tailed. I'd leave my car here and take a rent car. I'd turn it in just short of the county line and buy a second-hand job. Halfway to where I'm going I trade it on a new last's model, a leftover. This is just the right time of year. Good discount, new models out soon. Not to save money—less show off. Where I'd go is a good-sized place but still pretty clean."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Wichita, last I heard. But it may have changed."

He scowled at me. "Get smart, Marlowe, but not too damn smart."

"I'll get as smart as I want to. Don't try to make rules for me. If I take this on, there aren't any rules. I take it for this grand and the rest if I bring it off. Don't cross me. I might leak information. If I get knocked off, put just one red rose on my grave. I don't like cut flowers. I like to see them growing. But I could take one, because you're such a sweet character. When's the plane in?"

"Sometime today. It's nine hours from New York. Probably come in about 5.30 p.m."

"Might come by San Diego and switch or by San Francisco and switch. A lot of planes from Dago and Frisco. I need a helper."

"Goddam you, Marlowe—"

"Hold it. I know a girl. Daughter of a chief of police who got broken for honesty. She wouldn't leak under torture."

"You got no right to risk her," Ikky said angrily.

I was so astonished my jaw hung halfway to my waist. I closed it slowly and swallowed.

"Good God, the man's got a heart."

"Women ain't built for the rough stuff," he said grudgingly.

I picked up the thousand dollar note and snapped it. "Sorry. No receipt," I said. "I can't have my name in your pocket. And there won't be any rough stuff if I'm lucky.

They'd have me outclassed. There's only one way to work it. Now give me your address and all the dope you can think of, names, descriptions of any operators you have ever seen in the flesh."

He did. He was a pretty good observer. Trouble was the Outfit would know what he had seen. The operators would be strangers to him.

He got up silently and put his hand out. I had to shake it, but what he had said about women made it easier. His hand was moist. Mine would have been in his spot. He nodded and went out silently.

It was a quiet street in Bay City, if there are any quiet streets in this beatnik generation when you can't get through a meal without some male or female stomach singer belching out a kind of love that is as old-fashioned as a bustle or some Hammond organ jazzing it up in the customer's soup.

The little one-storey house was as neat as a fresh pinafore. The front lawn was cut lovingly and very green. The smooth composition driveway was free of grease spots from standing cars, and the hedge that bordered it looked as though the barber came every day.

The white door had a knocker with a tiger's head, a go-to-hell window and a dingus that let someone inside talk to someone outside without even opening the little window.

I'd have given a mortgage on my left leg to live in a house like that. I didn't think I ever would.

The bell chimed inside and after a while she opened the door in a pale blue sports shirt and white shorts that were short enough to be friendly. She had grey-blue eyes, dark red hair and fine bones in her face. There was usually a trace of bitterness in the grey-blue eyes. She couldn't forget that her father's life had been destroyed by the crooked power of a gambling ship mobster—that her mother had died too. She was able to suppress the bitterness when she wrote non-sense about young love for the shiny magazines, but this wasn't her life. She didn't really have a life. She had an existence without much pain and enough oil money to make it safe. But in a tight spot she was as cool and resourceful as a good cop. Her name was Anne Riordan.

She stood to one side and I passed her pretty close. But I have rules too. She shut the door and parked herself on a davenport and went through the cigarette routine, and here was one doll who had the strength to light her own cigarette.

I stood looking around. There were a few changes, not many.

"I need your help," I said.

"That's the only time I ever see you."

"I've got a client who is an ex-hood; used to be a trouble-shooter for the Outfit, the Syndicate, the big mob, or whatever name you want to use for it. You know damn well it exists and is as rich as Rockefeller. You can't beat it because not enough people want to, especially the million-a-year lawyers that work for it, and the bar associations that seem more anxious to protect other lawyers than their own country."

"My God, are you running for office somewhere? I never knew you to sound so pure."

She moved her legs around, not provocatively—she wasn't the type—but it made it difficult for me to think straight just the same.

"Stop moving your legs around," I said. "Or else put a pair of slacks on."

"Damn you, Marlowe. Can't you think of anything else?"

"I'll try. I like to think that I know at least one pretty and charming female who doesn't have round heels." I swallowed and went on. "The man's name is Ikky Rosenstein. He's not beautiful and he's not anything that I like—except one. He got mad when I said I needed a girl helper. He said women were not made for the rough stuff. That's why I took the job. To a real mobster, a woman means no more than a sack of flour. They use women in the usual way, but if it's advisable to get rid of them, they do it without a second thought."

"So far you've told me a whole lot of nothing. Perhaps you need a cup of coffee or a drink."

"You're sweet but I don't in the morning—except sometimes and this isn't one of them. Coffee later. Ikky has been pencilled."

"Now what's that?"

"You have a list. You draw a line through a name with a pencil. The guy is then as good as dead. The Outfit has its reasons. They don't do it just for kicks any more. They don't get any kick. It's book-keeping to them."

"What can I do—what can *you* do?"

"I can try. What you can do is help me spot their plane and see where they go—the operators assigned to the job."

"Yes, but how can you do anything?"

"I said I could try. If they took a night plane they are already here. If they took a morning plane they can't be here before five or so. Plenty of time to get set. You know what they look like."

"Oh sure. I meet killers every day. I have them in for whisky sours and caviare on hot toast." She grinned. While she was grinning I took four long steps across the tan figured rug and lifted her and put a kiss on her mouth. She didn't fight me but she didn't go all trembly either. I went back and sat down.

"They'll look like anybody who's in a quiet well-run business or profession. They'll have quiet clothes and they'll be polite—when they want to be. They'll have briefcases with guns in them that have changed hands so often they can't possibly be traced. When and if they do the job, they'll drop the guns. They'll probably use revolvers, but they could use automatics. They won't use silencers because silencers can jam a gun and the weight makes it hard to shoot accurately. They won't sit together on the plane, but once off it they may pretend to know each other and simply not have noticed during the flight. They may shake hands with appropriate smiles and walk away and get in the same taxi. I think they'll go to a hotel first. But very soon they will move into something from which they can watch Ikky's movements and get used to his schedule. They won't be in any hurry unless Ikky makes a move. That would tip them off that Ikky has been tipped off. He has a couple of friends left—he says."

"Will they shoot him from this room or apartment across the street—assuming there is one?"

"No. They'll shoot him from three feet away. They'll walk up behind him and say, 'Hello, Ikky.' He'll either freeze or turn. They'll fill him with lead, drop the guns, and hop into the car they have waiting. Then they'll follow the crash car off the scene."

"Who'll drive the crash car?"

"Some well-fixed and blameless citizen who hasn't been rapped. He'll drive his own car. He'll clear the way, even if he has to accidentally on purpose crash somebody, even a police car. He'll be so goddam sorry he'll cry all the way down his monogrammed shirt. And the killers will be gone."

"Good heavens," Anne said. "How can you stand your life? If you did bring it off, they'll send operators to you."

"I don't think so. They don't kill a legit. The blame will go to the operators. Remember, these top mobsters are businessmen. They want lots and lots of money. They only get really tough when they figure they have to get rid of somebody, and they don't crave that. There's always a chance of a slip-up. Not much of a chance. No gang killing has ever been solved here or anywhere else except two or three times. Lepke Buchalter fried. Remember Anastasia? He was awful big and awful tough. Too big, too tough. Pencil."

She shuddered a little. "I think I need a drink myself."

I grinned at her. "You're right in the atmosphere, darling. I'll weaken."

She brought a couple of Scotch highballs. When we were drinking them I said, "If you spot them or think you spot them, follow to where they go—if you can do it safely. Not otherwise. If it's a hotel—and ten to one it will be—check in and keep calling me until you get me."

She knew my office number and I was still on Yucca Avenue. She knew that too.

"You're the damnedest guy," she said. "Women do anything you want them to. How come I'm still a virgin at twenty-eight?"

"We need a few like you. Why don't you get married?"

"To what? Some cynical chaser who has nothing left but technique? I don't know any really nice men—except you. I'm no pushover for white teeth and a gaudy smile."

I went over and pulled her to her feet. I kissed her long and hard. "I'm honest," I almost whispered. "That's something. But I'm too shop-soiled for a girl like you. I've thought of you, I've wanted you, but that sweet clear look in your eyes tells me to lay off."

"Take me," she said softly. "I have dreams too."

"I couldn't. It's not the first time it's happened to me. I've had too many women to deserve one like you. We have to save a man's life. I'm going."

She stood up and watched me leave with a grave face.

The women you get and the women you don't get—they live in different worlds. I don't sneer at either world. I live in both myself.

At Los Angeles International Airport you can't get close to the planes unless you're leaving on one. You see them land, if

you happen to be in the right place, but you have to wait at a barrier to get a look at the passengers. The airport buildings don't make it any easier. They are strung out from here to breakfast time, and you can get calluses walking from TWA to American.

I copied an arrival schedule off the boards and prowled around like a dog that has forgotten where he put his bone. Planes came in, planes took off, porters carried luggage, passengers sweated and scurried, children whined, the loudspeaker over-rode all the other noises.

I passed Anne a number of times. She took no notice of me.

At 5.45 they must have come. Anne disappeared. I gave it half an hour, just in case she had some other reason for fading. No. She was gone for good. I went out to my car and drove some long crowded miles to Hollywood and my office. I had a drink and sat. At 6.45 the phone rang.

"I think so," she said. "Beverly-Western Hotel. Room 410. I couldn't get any names. You know the clerks don't leave registration cards lying around these days. I didn't like to ask any questions. But I rode up in the elevator with them and spotted their room. I walked right on past them when the bellhop put a key in their door, and walked down to the mezzanine and then downstairs with a bunch of women from the tea room. I didn't bother to take a room."

"What were they like?"

"They came up the ramp together but I didn't hear them speak. Both had briefcases, both wore quiet suits, nothing flashy. White shirts, starched, one blue tie, one black striped with grey. Black shoes. A couple of businessmen from the East Coast. They could be publishers, lawyers, doctors, account executives—no, cut the last; they weren't gaudy enough. You wouldn't look at them twice."

"Look at them twice. Faces."

"Both medium brown hair, one a bit darker than the other. Smooth faces, rather expressionless. One had grey eyes; the one with the lighter hair had blue eyes. Their eyes were interesting. Very quick to move, very observant, watching everything near them. That might have been wrong. They should have been a bit preoccupied with what they came out for or interested in California. They seemed more occupied with faces. It's a good thing I spotted them and not you. You don't look like a cop, but you don't look like a man who is not a cop. You have marks on you."

"Phooey. I'm a damn goodlooking heart wrecker."

"Their features were strictly assembly line. Neither looked Italian. Each picked up a flight suitcase. One suitcase was grey with two red and white stripes up and down, about six or seven inches from the ends, the other a blue and white tartan. I didn't know there was such a tartan."

"There is, but I forget the name of it."

"I thought you knew everything."

"Just almost everything. Run along home now."

"Do I get a dinner and maybe a kiss?"

"Later, and if you're not careful you'll get more than you want."

"A rapist, eh? I'll carry a gun. You'll take over and follow them?"

"If they're the right men, they'll follow me. I already took an apartment across the street from Ikky. That block on Poynter and the two on each side of it have about six lowlife apartment houses to the block. I'll bet the incidence of chippies is very high."

"It's high everywhere these days."

"So long, Anne. See you."

"When you need help."

She hung up. I hung up. She puzzled me. Too wise to be so nice. I guess all nice women are wise too. I called Ikky. He was out. I had a drink from the office bottle, smoked for half an hour and called again. This time I got him.

I told him the score up to then, and said I hoped Anne had picked the right men. I told him about the apartment I had taken.

"Do I get expenses?" I asked.

"Five grand ought to cover the lot."

"If I earn it and get it. I heard you had a quarter of a million," I said at a wild venture.

"Could be, pal; but how do I get at it? The high boys know where it is. It'll have to cool a long time."

I said that was all right. I had cooled a long time myself. Of course I didn't expect to get the four thousand, even if I brought the job off. Men like Ikky Rosenstein would steal their mother's gold teeth. There seemed to be a little good in him somewhere—but little was the operative word.

I spent the next half hour trying to think of a plan. I couldn't think of one that looked promising. It was almost eight o'clock and I needed food. I didn't think the boys

would move that night. Next morning they would drive past Ikky's place and scout the neighbourhood.

I was ready to leave the office when the buzzer sounded from the door of my waiting room. I opened the communicating door. A small tight-looking man was standing in the middle of the floor rocking on his heels, with his hands behind his back. He smiled at me, but he wasn't good at it. He walked towards me.

"You Marlowe?"

"Who else? What can I do for you?"

He was close now. He brought his right hand around fast with a gun in it. He stuck the gun in my stomach.

"You can lay off Ikky Rosenstein," he said in a voice that matched his face, "or you can get your belly full of lead."

He was an amateur. If he had stayed four feet away, he might have had something. I reached up and took the cigarette out of my mouth and held it carelessly.

"What makes you think I know any Ikky Rosenstein?"

He laughed a high-pitched laugh and pushed his gun into my stomach.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" The cheap sneer, the empty triumph of that feeling of power when you hold a fat gun in a small hand.

"It would be fair to tell me."

As his mouth opened for another crack, I dropped the cigarette and swept a hand. I can be fast when I have to. There are boys that are faster, but they don't stick guns in your stomach. I got my thumb behind the trigger and my hand over his. I kneed him in the groin. He bent over with a whimper. I twisted his arm to the right and I had his gun. I hooked a heel behind his heel and he was on the floor. He lay there blinking with surprise and pain, his knees drawn up against his stomach. He rolled from side to side groaning. I reached down and grabbed his left hand and yanked him to his feet. I had six inches and forty pounds on him. They ought to have sent a bigger, better trained messenger.

"Let's go into my thinking parlour," I said. "We could have a chat and you could have a drink to pick you up. Next time don't get near enough to a prospect for him to get your gun hand. I'll just see if you have any more iron on you."

He hadn't. I pushed him through the door and into a chair. His breath wasn't quite so rasping. He grabbed out a handkerchief and mopped at his face.

"Next time," he said between his teeth. "Next time."

"Don't be an optimist. You don't look the part."

I poured him a drink of Scotch in a paper cup, set it down in front of him. I broke his .38 and dumped the cartridges into the desk drawer. I clicked the chamber back and laid the gun down.

"You can have it when you leave—if you leave."

"That's a dirty way to fight," he said, still gasping.

"Sure. Shooting a man is so much cleaner. Now, how did you get here?"

"Go to hell."

"Don't be a crumb. I have friends. Not many, but some. I can get you for armed assault, and you know what would happen then. You'd be out on a writ or on bail and that's the last anyone would hear of you. The biggies don't go for failures. Now who sent you and how did you know where to come?"

"Ikky was covered," he said sullenly. "He's dumb. I trailed him here without no trouble at all. Why would he go see a private eye? People want to know."

"More."

"Go to hell."

"Come to think of it, I don't have to get you for armed assault. I can smash it out of you right here and now."

I got up from the chair and he put a flat hand out.

"If I get knocked about, a couple of real tough monkeys will drop around. If I don't report back, same thing. You ain't holding no real high cards. They just look high," he said.

"You haven't anything to tell. If this Ikky guy came to see me, you don't know why, nor whether I took him on. If he's a mobster, he's not my type of client."

"He come to get you to try to save his hide."

"Who from?"

"That'd be talking."

"Go right ahead. Your mouth seems to work fine. And tell the boys any time I front for a hood, that will be the day."

You have to lie a little once in a while in my business. I was lying a little. "What's Ikky done to get himself disliked? Or would that be talking?"

"You think you're a lot of man," he sneered, rubbing the place where I had kneed him. "In my league you wouldn't make pinch runner."

I laughed in his face. Then I grabbed his right wrist and

twisted it behind his back. He began to squawk. I reached into his breast pocket with my left hand and hauled out a wallet. I let him go. He reached for his gun on the desk and I bisected his upper arm with a hard cut. He fell into the customer's chair and grunted.

"You can have your gun," I told him. "When I give it to you. Now be good or I'll have to bounce you just to amuse myself."

In the wallet I found a driver's licence made out to Charles Hickon. It did me no good at all. Punks of his type always have slangy pseudonyms. They probably called him Tiny, or Slim, or Marbles, or even just "you." I tossed the wallet back to him. It fell to the floor. He couldn't even catch it.

"Hell," I said, "there must be an economy campaign on, if they sent you to do more than pick up cigarette butts."

"Shut up."

"All right, mug. Beat it back to the laundry. Here's your gun."

He took it, made a business of shoving it into his waistband, stood up, gave me as dirty a look as he had in stock, and strolled to the door, nonchalant as a hustler with a new mink stole. He turned at the door and gave me the beady eye.

"Stay clean, tinhorn. Tin bends easy."

With this blinding piece of repartee he opened the door and drifted out.

After a little while I locked my other door, cut the buzzer, made the office dark, and left. I saw no-one who looked like a lifetaker. I drove to my house, packed a suitcase, drove to a service station where they were almost fond of me, stored my car and picked up a Hertz Chevrolet. I drove this to Poynter Street, dumped my suitcase in the sleazy apartment I had rented early in the afternoon, and went to dinner at Victor's. It was nine o'clock, too late to drive to Bay City and take Anne to dinner. She'd have cooked her own long ago.

I ordered a double gin with fresh limes and drank it, and I was as hungry as a schoolboy.

On the way back to Poynter Street I did a good deal of weaving in and out and circling blocks and stopping, with a gun on the seat beside me. As far as I could tell, no-one was trying to tail me.

I stopped on Sunset at a service station and made two

calls from the box. I caught Bernie Ohls just as he was leaving to go home.

"This is Marlowe, Bernie. We haven't had a fight in years. I'm getting lonely."

"Well, get married. I'm chief investigator for the Sheriff's Office now. I rank acting-captain until I pass the exam. I don't hardly speak to private eyes."

"Speak to this one. I could need help. I'm on a ticklish job where I could get killed."

"And you expect me to interfere with the course of nature?"

"Come off it, Bernie. I haven't been a bad guy. I'm trying to save an ex-mobster from a couple of executioners."

"The more they mow each other down, the better I like it."

"Yeah. If I call you, come running or send a couple of good boys. You'll have had time to teach them."

We exchanged a couple of mild insults and hung up. I dialled Ikky Rosenstein's number. His rather unpleasant voice said, "Okay, talk."

"Marlowe. Be ready to move out about midnight. We've spotted your boyfriends and they are holed up at the Beverly-Western. They won't move to your street tonight. Remember, they don't know you've been tipped."

"Sounds chancy."

"Good God, it wasn't meant to be a Sunday School picnic! You've been careless, Ikky. You were followed to my office. That cuts the time we have."

He was silent for a moment. I heard him breathing. "Who by?" he asked.

"Some little tweezer who stuck a gun in my belly and gave me the trouble of taking it away from him. I can only figure why they sent a punk on the theory that they don't want me to know too much, in case I don't know it already."

"You're in for trouble, friend."

"When not? I'll come over to your place about midnight. Be ready. Where's your car?"

"Out front."

"Get it on a side street and make a business of locking it up. Where's the back door of your flop?"

"At the back. Where would it be? On the alley."

"Leave your suitcase there. We walk out together and go to your car. We drive down the alley and pick up the suitcase or cases."

"Suppose some guy steals them?"

"Yeah. Suppose you get dead. Which do you like better?"

"Okay," he grunted. "I'm waiting. But we're taking big chances."

"So do racing drivers. Does that stop them? There's no way to get out but fast. Douse your lights about ten and rumple the bed well. It would be good if you could leave some baggage behind. Wouldn't look so planned."

He grunted another okay and I hung up. The telephone box was well lighted outside. They usually are, at service stations. I took a good long gander around while I pawed over the collection of give-away maps inside the station. I saw nothing to worry me. I took a map of San Diego just for the hell of it and got into my rent car.

On Poynter I parked around the corner and went up to my second-floor sleazy apartment and sat in the dark watching from my window. I saw nothing to worry about. A couple of medium-class chippies came out of Ikky's apartment house and were picked up in a late model car. A man about Ikky's height and build went into the apartment house. Various people came and went. The street was fairly quiet. Since they put in the Hollywood Freeway nobody much uses the off-the-boulevard streets unless they live in the neighbourhood.

It was a nice fall night—or as nice as they get in Los Angeles' spoiled climate—clearish but not even crisp. I don't know what's happened to the weather in our overcrowded city, but it's not the weather I knew when I came to it.

It seemed like a long time to midnight. I couldn't spot anybody watching anything, and no couple of quiet-suited men paged any of the six apartment houses available. I was pretty sure they'd try mine first when they came—if Anne had picked the right men, and if anybody had come at all, and if the tweezer's message back to his bosses had done me any good or otherwise. In spite of the hundred ways Anne could be wrong, I had a hunch she was right. The killers had no reason to be cagey if they didn't know Ikky had been warned. No reason but one. He had come to my office and been tailed there. But the Outfit, with all its arrogance of power, might laugh at the idea he had been tipped off or come to me for help. I was so small they would hardly see me.

At midnight I left the apartment, walked two blocks watching for a tail, crossed the street and went into Ikky's dive. There was no locked door, and no elevator. I climbed steps to the third floor and looked for his apartment. I knocked lightly. He opened the door with a gun in his hand. He probably looked scared.

There were two suitcases by the door and another against the far wall. I went over and lifted it. It was heavy enough. I opened it. It was unlocked.

"You don't have to worry," he said. "It's got everything a guy could need for three-four nights, and nothing except some clothes that I couldn't glom off in any ready-to-wear

I picked up another case. "Let's stash this by the back door."

"We can leave by the alley too."

"We leave by the front door. Just in case we're covered—though I don't think so—we're just two guys going out together. Just one thing. Keep both hands in your coat pockets and the gun in your right. If anybody calls out your name behind you, turn fast and shoot. Nobody but a life-taker will do it. I'll do the same."

"I'm scared," he said in his rusty voice.

"Me, too, if it helps any. But we have to do it. If you're braced, they'll have guns in their hands. Don't bother asking them questions. They wouldn't answer in words. If it's just my small friend, we'll cool him and dump him inside the door. Got it?"

He nodded, licking his lips. We carried the suitcases down

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and put them outside the back door. I looked along the alley. Nobody, and only a short distance to the side street. We went back in and along the hall to the front. We walked out on Poynter Street with all the casualness of a wife buying her husband a birthday tie.

Nobody made a move. The street was empty. We walked around the corner to Ikky's rent car. He unlocked it. I went back with him for the suitcases. Not a stir. We put the suitcases in the car and started up and drove to the next street.

A traffic light not working, a boulevard stop or two, the entrance to the Freeway. There was plenty of traffic on it even at midnight. California is loaded with people going places and making speed to get there. If you don't drive eighty miles an hour, everybody passes you. If you do, you have to watch the rear-view mirror for highway patrol cars. It's the rat race of rat races.

Ikky did a quiet seventy. We reached the junction to Route 66 and he took it. So far nothing. I stayed with him to Pomona.

"This is far enough for me," I said. "I'll grab a bus back if there is one, or park myself in a motor court. Drive to a service station and we'll ask for the bus stop. It should be close to the Freeway. Take us towards the business section."

He did that and stopped midway of a block. He reached out his pocketbook, and held out four thousand-dollar bills to me.

"I don't really feel I've earned all that. It was too easy."

He laughed with a kind of wry amusement on his pudgy face. "Don't be a sap. I have it made. You didn't know what you was walking into. What's more, your troubles are just beginning. The Outfit has eyes and ears everywhere. Perhaps I'm safe if I'm damn careful. Perhaps I ain't as safe as I think I am. Either way, you did what I asked. Take the dough. I got plenty."

I took it and put it away. He drove to an all-night service station and we were told where to find the bus stop. "There's a cross-country Greyhound at 2.25 a.m.," the attendant said, looking at a schedule.

"They'll take you, if they got room."

Ikky drove to the bus stop. We shook hands and he went gunning down the road towards the Freeway. I looked at my watch and found a liquor store still open and bought a pint

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of Scotch. Then I found a bar and ordered a double with water.

My troubles were just begining, Ikky had said. He was so right . . .

I got off at the Hollywood bus station, grabbed a taxi and drove to my office. I asked the driver to wait a few moments. At that time of night he was glad to. The coloured night man let me into the building.

"You work late, Mr. Marlowe. But you always did, didn't you?"

"It's that sort of a business," I said. "Thanks, Jasper."

Up in my office I pawed the floor for mail and found nothing but a longish narrowish box, Special Delivery, with a Glendale postmark.

It contained nothing at all but a new, freshly-sharpened pencil, the mobster's mark of death.

I didn't take it too hard. When they mean it, they don't send it to you. I took it as a sharp warning to lay off. There might be a beating arranged. From their point of view, that would be good discipline. "When we pencil a guy, any guy that tries to help him is in for a smashing." That could be the message.

I thought of going to my house on Yucca Avenue. Too lonely. I thought of going to Anne's place in Bay City. Worse. If they got wise to her, real hoods would think nothing of raping her and then beating her up.

It was the Poynter Street flop for me. Easily the safest place now. I went down to the waiting taxi and had him drive me to within three blocks of the so-called apartment house. I went upstairs, undressed and slept raw. Nothing bothered me but a broken spring. That bothered my back. I lay until 3.30 pondering the situation with my massive brain. I went to sleep with a gun under the pillow, which is a bad place to keep a gun when you have one pillow as thick and soft as a typewriter pad. It bothered me, so I transferred it to my right hand. Practice had taught me to keep it there even in sleep.

I woke up with the sun shining. I felt like a piece of spoiled meat. I struggled into the bathroom and doused myself with cold water and wiped off with a towel you couldn't have seen if you held it sideways. This was a really gorgeous apartment. All it needed was a set of Chippendale furniture to graduate it into the slum class.

There was nothing to eat and if I went out, Miss-Nothing Marlowe might miss something. I had a pint of whisky. I looked at it and smelled it, but I couldn't take it for breakfast, on an empty stomach, even if I could reach my stomach, which was floating around near the ceiling. I looked into the closets in case a previous tenant might have left a crust of bread in a hasty departure. Nope. I wouldn't have liked it anyhow, not even with whisky on it. So I sat in the window. An hour of that and I was ready to bite a piece off a bellhop.

I dressed and went around the corner to the rent car and drove to an eatery. The waitress was sore too. She swept a cloth over the counter in front of me and let me have the last customer's crumbs in my lap.

"Look, sweetness," I said, "don't be so generous. Save the crumbs for a rainy day. All I want is two eggs three minutes—no more—a slice of your famous concrete toast, a tall glass tomato juice with a dash of Lea and Perrins, a big happy smile, and don't give anybody else any coffee. I might need it all."

"I got a cold," she said. "Don't push me around. I might crack you one on the kisser."

"Let's be pals. Come on there, I had a rough night too."

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She gave me a half-smile and went through the swing door sideways. It showed more of her curves, which were ample, even excessive. But I got the eggs the way I liked them. The toast had been painted with melted butter past its bloom.

"No Lea and Perrins," she said, putting down the tomato juice. "How about a little Tabasco? We're fresh out of arsenic too."

I used two drops of Tabasco, swallowed the eggs, drank two cups of coffee and was about to leave the toast for a tip, but I went soft and left a quarter instead. That really brightened her. It was a joint where you left a dime or nothing. Mostly nothing.

Back on Poynter nothing had changed. I got to my window again and sat. At about 8.30 the man I had seen go into the apartment house across the way—the one with the same sort of height and build as Ikky—came out with a small briefcase and turned east. Two men got out of a dark blue sedan. They were of the same height and very quietly dressed and had soft hats pulled low over their foreheads. Each jerked out a revolver.

"Hey, Ikky!" one of them called out.

The man turned. "So long, Ikky," the other man said. Gunfire racketed between the houses. The man crumpled and lay motionless. The two men rushed for their car and were off, going west. Halfway down the block I saw a Caddy pull out and start ahead of them.

In no time at all they were completely gone.

It was a nice swift clean job. The only thing wrong with it was that they hadn't given it enough time for preparation.

They had shot the wrong man.

I got out of there fast, almost as fast as the two killers. There was a smallish crowd grouped around the dead man. I didn't have to look at him to know he was dead—the boys were pros. Where he lay on the sidewalk on the other side of the street I couldn't see him; people were in the way. But I knew just how he would look and I already heard the sirens in the distance. It could have been just the routine shrieking from Sunset, but it wasn't. So somebody had telephoned. It was too early for the cops to be going to lunch.

I strolled around the corner with my suitcase and jammed into the rent car and went away from there. The neighbourhood was not my piece of shortcake any more. I could imagine the questions.

"Just what took you over there, Marlowe? You got a flop of your own, ain't you?"

"I was hired by an ex-mobster in trouble with the Outfit. They'd sent killers after him."

"Don't tell us he was trying to go straight."

"I don't know. But I liked his money."

"Didn't do much to earn it, did you?"

"I got him away last night. I don't know where he is now. I don't want to know."

"You got him away?"

"That's what I said."

"Yeah—only he's in the morgue with multiple bullet wounds. Try something better. Or somebody's in the morgue."

And on and on. Policeman's dialogue. It comes out of an old shoe box. What they say doesn't mean anything, what they ask doesn't mean anything. They just keep boring in until you are so exhausted you flip on some detail. Then they smile happily and rub their hands, and say, "Kind of careless there, weren't you? Let's start all over again."

The less I had of that, the better. I parked in my usual parking slot and went up to the office. It was full of nothing but stale air. Every time I went into the dump it felt more and more tired. Why the hell hadn't I got myself a government job ten years ago? Make it fifteen years. I had brains enough to get a mail-order law degree. The country's full of lawyers that couldn't write a complaint without the book.

So I sat in my office chair and disadmired myself. After a while I remembered the pencil. I made certain arrangements with a forty-five gun, more gun than I ever carry—too much weight. I dialled the Sheriff's Office and asked for Bernie Ohls. I got him. His voice was sour.

"Marlowe here. I'm in trouble—real trouble."

"Why tell me?" he growled. "You must be used to it by now."

"This kind of trouble you don't get used to. I'd like to come over and tell you."

"You in the same office?"

"The same."

"Have to go over that way. I'll drop in."

He hung up. I opened two windows. The gentle breeze wafted a smell of coffee and stale fat to me from Joe's Eats next door. I hated it, I hated myself, I hated everything.

Ohls didn't bother with my elegant waiting room. He

rapped on my own door and I let him in. He scowled his way to the customer's chair.

"Okay. Give."

"Ever hear of a character named Ikky Rosenstein?"

"Why would I? Record?"

"An ex-mobster who got disliked by the mob. They put a pencil through his name and sent the usual two tough boys on a plane. He got tipped and hired me to help him get away."

"Nice clean work."

"Cut it out, Bernie." I lit a cigarette and blew smoke in his face. In retaliation he began to chew a cigarette. He never lit one, but he certainly mangled them.

"Look," I went on. "Suppose the man wants to go straight and suppose he doesn't. He's entitled to his life as long as he hasn't killed anyone. He told me he hadn't."

"And you believed the hood, huh? When do you start teaching Sunday School?"

"I neither believed him nor disbelieved him. I took him on. There was no reason not to. A girl I know and I watched the planes yesterday. She spotted the boys and tailed them to a hotel. She was sure of what they were. They looked it right down to their black shoes. They got off the plane separately and then pretended to know each other and not to have noticed on the plane. This girl—"

"Would she have a name?"

"Only for you."

"I'll buy, if she hasn't cracked any laws."

"Her name is Anne Riordan. She lives in Bay City. Her father was once Chief of Police there. And don't say that makes him a crook, because he wasn't."

"Uh-huh. Let's have the rest. Make a little time too."

"I took an apartment opposite Ikky. The killers were still at the hotel. At midnight I got Ikky out and drove with him as far as Pomona. He went on in his rent car and I came back by Greyhound bus. I moved into the apartment on Poynter Street, right across from his dump."

"Why—if he was already gone?"

I opened the middle desk drawer and took out the nice sharp pencil.

I wrote my name on a piece of paper and ran the pencil through it.

"Because someone sent me this. I didn't think they'd kill me, but I thought they planned to give me enough of a beating to warn me off any more pranks."

"They knew you were in on it?"

"Ikky was tailed here by a little squirt who later came around and stuck a gun in my stomach. I knocked him around a bit, but I had to let him go. I thought Poynter Street was safer after that. I live lonely."

"I get around," Bernie Ohls said. "I hear reports. So they gunned the wrong guy."

"Same height, same build, same general appearance. I saw them gun him. I couldn't tell if it was the two guys from the Beverly-Western. I'd never seen them. It was just two guys in dark suits with hats pulled down. They jumped into a blue Pontiac sedan, about two years old, and lammed off, with a big Caddy running crash for them."

Bernie stood up and stared at me for a long moment. "I don't think they'll bother with you now," he said. "They've hit the wrong guy. The mob will be very quiet for a while. You know something? This town is getting to be almost as lousy as New York, Brooklyn and Chicago. We could end up real corrupt."

"We've made a hell of a good start."

"You haven't told me anything that makes me take action, Phil. I'll talk to the city homicide boys. I don't guess you're in any trouble. But you saw the shooting. They'll want that."

"I couldn't identify anybody, Bernie. I didn't know the man who was shot. How did *you* know it was the wrong man?"

"You told me, stupid."

"I thought perhaps the city boys had a make on him."

"They wouldn't tell me, if they had. Besides, they ain't hardly had time to go out for breakfast. He's just a stiff in the morgue to them until the ID comes up with something. But they'll want to talk to you, Phil. They just love their tape recorders."

He went out and the door whooshed shut behind him. I sat there wondering whether I had been a dope to talk to him. Or to take Ikky's troubles on. Five thousand green men said no. But they can be wrong too.

Somebody banged on my door. It was a uniform holding

a telegram. I took it, receipted for it and tore it loose. It said:

ON MY WAY TO FLAGSTAFF. MIRADOR MOTOR COURT. THINK I'VE BEEN SPOTTED. COME FAST.

I tore the wire into small pieces and burnt them in my big ashtray.

I called Anne Riordan.

"Funny thing happened," I told her, and told her about the funny thing.

"I don't like the pencil," she said. "And I don't like the wrong man being killed, probably some poor book-keeper in a cheap business or he wouldn't be living in that neighbourhood. You should never have touched it, Phil."

"Ikky had a life. Where he's going he might make himself decent. He can change his name. He must be loaded or he wouldn't have paid me so much."

"I said I didn't like the pencil. You'd better come down here for a while. You can have your mail readdressed—if you get any mail. You don't have to work right away anyhow. And Los Angeles is oozing with private eyes."

"You don't get the point. I'm not through with the job. The city dicks have to know where I am, and if they do, all the crime beat reporters will know too. The cops might even decide to make me a suspect. Nobody who saw the shooting is going to put out a description that means anything. The American people know better than to be witnesses to gang killings."

"All right, loud brain. But my offer stands."

The buzzer sounded in the outside room. I told Anne I had to hang up. I opened the communicating door and a well-dressed—I might say elegantly dressed—middle-aged man stood six feet inside the outer door. He had a pleasantly dishonest smile on his face. He wore a white Stetson and one of those narrow ties that go through an ornamental buckle. His cream-coloured flannel suit was beautifully tailored.

He lit a cigarette with a gold lighter and looked at me over the first puff of smoke.

"Mr. Marlowe?"

I nodded.

"I'm Foster Grimes from Las Vegas. I run the Rancho Esperanza on South Fifth. I hear you got a little involved with a man named Ikky Rosenstein."

"Won't you come in?"

He strolled past me into my office. His appearance told

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me nothing. A prosperous man who liked or felt it good business to look a bit western. You see them by the dozen in the Palm Springs winter season. His accent told me he was an easterner, but not New England. New York or Baltimore, likely. Long Island, the Berkshires—no, too far from the city.

I showed him the customer's chair with a flick of the wrist and sat down in my antique swivel-squeaker. I waited.

"Where is Ikky now, if you know?"

"I don't know, Mr. Grimes."

"How come you messed with him?"

"Money."

"A damned good reason," he smiled. "How far did it go?"

"I helped him leave town. I'm telling you this, although I don't know who the hell you are, because I've already told an old friend-enemy of mine, a top man in the Sheriff's Office."

"What's a friend-enemy?"

"Law men don't go around kissing me, but I've known him for years, and we are as much friends as a private star can be with a law man."

"I told you who I was. We have a unique set-up in Vegas. We own the place except for one lousy newspaper editor who keeps climbing our backs and the backs of our friends. We let him live because letting him live makes us look better than knocking him off. Killings are not good business any more."

"Like Ikky Rosenstein."

"That's not a killing. It's an execution. Ikky got out of line."

"So your gun boys had to rub the wrong guy. They could have hung around a little to make sure."

"They would have, if you'd kept your nose where it belonged. They hurried. We don't appreciate that. We want cool efficiency."

"Who's this great big fat 'we' you keep talking about?"

"Don't go juvenile on me, Marlowe."

"Okay. Let's say I know."

"Here's what we want." He reached into his pocket and drew out a loose bill. He put it on the desk on his side. "Find Ikky and tell him to get back in line and everything is oke. With an innocent bystander gunned, we don't want any trouble or any extra publicity. It's that simple. You

get this now," he nodded at the bill. It was a grand. Probably the smallest bill they had. "And another when you find Ikky and give him the message. If he holds out—curtains."

"Suppose I say take your goddam grand and blow your nose with it?"

"That would be unwise." He flipped out a Colt Woodsman with a short silencer on it. A Colt Woodsman will take one without jamming. He was fast too, fast and smooth. The genial expression on his face didn't change.

"I never left Vegas," he said calmly. "I can prove it. You're dead in your office chair and nobody knows anything. Just another private eye that tried the wrong pitch. Put your hands on the desk and think a little. Incidentally, I'm a crack shot even with this damned silencer."

"Just to sink a little lower in the social scale, Mr. Grimes, I ain't putting no hands on no desk. But tell me about this."

I flipped the nicely sharpened pencil across to him. He grabbed for it after a swift change of the gun to his left hand—very swift. He held the pencil up so that he could look at it without taking his eyes off me.

I said, "It came to me by Special Delivery mail. No message, no return address. Just the pencil. Think I've never heard about the pencil, Mr. Grimes?"

He frowned and tossed the pencil down. Before he could shift his long lithe gun back to his right hand I dropped mine under the desk and grabbed the butt of the .45 and put my finger hard on the trigger.

"Look under the desk, Mr. Grimes. You'll see a .45 in an open-end holster. It's fixed there and it's pointing at your belly. Even if you could shoot me through the heart the .45 would still go off from a convulsive movement of my hand. And your belly would be hanging by a shred and you would be knocked out of that chair. A .45 slug can throw you back six feet. Even the movies learned that at last."

"Looks like a Mexican stand-off," he said quietly. He holstered his gun. He grinned. "Nice, smooth work, Marlowe. We could use you. But it's a long time for you and no time at all to us. Find Ikky and don't be a drip. He'll listen to reason. He doesn't really want to be on the run for the rest of his life. We'd trace him eventually."

"Tell me something, Mr. Grimes. Why pick on me? Apart from Ikky, what did I ever do to make you dislike me?"

Not moving, he thought a moment or pretended to. "The

Larsen case.' You helped send one of our boys to the gas chamber. That we don't forget. We had you in mind as a fall guy for Ikky. You'll always be a fall guy, unless you play it our way. Something will hit you when you least expect it."

"A man in my business is always a fall guy, Mr. Grimes. Pick up your grand and drift out quietly. I might decide to do it your way, but I have to think. As for the Larsen case, the cops did all the work. I just happened to know where he was. I don't guess you miss him terribly."

"We don't like interference." He stood up. He put the grand note casually back in his pocket. While he was doing it I let go of the .45 and jerked out my Smith and Wesson five-inch .38.

He looked at it contemptuously. "I'll be in Vegas, Marlowe. In fact I never left Vegas. You can catch me at the Esperanza. No, we don't give a damn about Larsen personally. Just another gun handler. They come in gross lots. We *do* give a damn that some punk private eye fingered him."

He nodded and went out by my office door.

I did some pondering. I knew Ikky wouldn't go back to the Outfit. He wouldn't trust them enough if he got the chance. But there was another reason now. I called Anne Riordan again.

"I'm going to look for Ikky. I have to. If I don't call you in three days, get hold of Bernie Ohls. I'm going to Flagstaff, Arizona. Ikky says he will be there."

"You're a fool," she wailed. "It's some sort of trap."

"A Mr. Grimes of Vegas visited me with a silenced gun. I beat him to the punch, but I won't always be that lucky. If I find Ikky and report to Grimes, the mob will let me alone."

"You'd condemn a man to death?" Her voice was sharp and incredulous.

"No. He won't be there when I report. He'll have to hop a plane to Montreal, buy forged papers—Montreal is almost as crooked as we are—and plane to Europe. He may be fairly safe there. But the Outfit has long arms and Ikky will have a damned dull life staying alive. He hasn't any choice. For him it's either hide or get the pencil."

"So clever of you, darling. What about your own pencil?"

"If they meant it, they wouldn't have sent it. Just a bit of scare technique."

"And you don't scare, you wonderful handsome brute."

"I scare. But it doesn't paralyse me. So long. Don't take any lovers until I get back."

"Damn you, Marlowe!"

She hung up on me. I hung up on myself.

Saying the wrong thing is one of my specialities.

I beat it out of town before the homicide boys could hear about me. It would take them quite a while to get a lead. And Bernie Ohls wouldn't give a city dick a used paper bag. The Sheriff's men and the City Police co-operate about as much as two tomcats on a fence.

I made Phoenix by evening and parked myself in a motor court on the outskirts. Phoenix was damned hot. The motor court had a dining room, so I had dinner. I collected some quarters and dimes from the cashier and shut myself in a phone booth and started to call the Mirador in Flagstaff. How silly could I get? Ikky might be registered under any name from Cohen to Cordileone, from Watson to Woichehovski. I called anyway and got nothing but as much of a smile as you can get on the phone. So I asked for a room the following night. Not a chance unless someone checked out, but they would put me down for a cancellation or something. Flagstaff is too near the Grand Canyon. Ikky must have arranged in advance. That was something to ponder too.

I bought a paperback and read it. I set my alarm watch for 6.30. The paperback scared me so badly that I put two guns under my pillow. It was about a guy who bucked the hoodlum boss of Milwaukee and got beaten up every fifteen minutes. I figured that his head and face would be nothing but a piece of bone with a strip of skin hanging from it. But in the next chapter he was as gay as a meadow lark. Then I asked myself why I was reading this drivel when I could have been memorising *The Brothers Karamazov*. Not knowing any good answers, I turned the light out and went to sleep. At 6.30 I shaved and showered and had breakfast and took off for Flagstaff. I got there by lunchtime, and there was Ikky in the restaurant eating mountain trout. I sat down across from him. He looked surprised to see me.

I ordered mountain trout and ate it from the outside in, which is the proper way. Boning spoils it a little.

"What gives?" he asked me with his mouth full. A delicate eater.

"You read the papers?"

"Just the sporting section."

"Let's go to your room and talk about it. There's more than that."

We paid for our lunches and went along to a nice double. The motor courts are getting so good that they make a lot of hotels look cheap. We sat down and lit cigarettes.

"The two hoods got up too early and went over to Poynter Street. They parked outside your apartment house. They hadn't been briefed carefully enough. They shot a guy who looked a little like you."

"That's a hot one," he grinned. "But the cops will find out, and the Outfit will find out. So the tag for me stays on."

"You must think I'm dumb," I said. "I am."

"I thought you did a first class job, Marlowe. What's dumb about that?"

"What job did I do?"

"You got me out of there pretty slick."

"Anything about it you couldn't have done yourself?"

"With luck—no. But it's nice to have a helper."

"You mean sucker."

His face tightened. And his rusty voice growled. "I don't catch. And give me back some of that five grand, will you? I'm shorter than I thought."

"'I'll give it back to you when you find a hummingbird in a salt shaker."

"Don't be like that," he almost sighed, and flicked a gun into his hand. I didn't have to flick. I was holding one in my side pocket.

"I oughtn't to have boobed off," I said. "Put the heater away. It doesn't pay any more than a Vegas slot machine."

"Wrong. Them machines pay the jackpot every so often. Otherwise—no customers."

"Every so seldom, you mean. Listen, and listen good."

He grinned. His dentist was tired waiting for him.

"The set-up intrigued me," I went on, debonair as Milo Vance in a Van Dyne story and a lot brighter in the head. "First off, could it be done? Second, if it could be done, where would I be? But gradually I saw the little touches that flaw the picture. Why would you come to me at all? The Outfit isn't that naive. Why would they send a little punk like this Charles Hickon or whatever name he uses on Thursdays? Why would an old hand like you let anybody trail you to a dangerous connection?"

"You slay me, Marlowe. You're so bright I could find you in the dark. You're so dumb you couldn't see a red white

and blue giraffe. I bet you were back there in your unbrain emporium playing with that five grand like a cat with a bag of catnip. I bet you were kissing the notes."

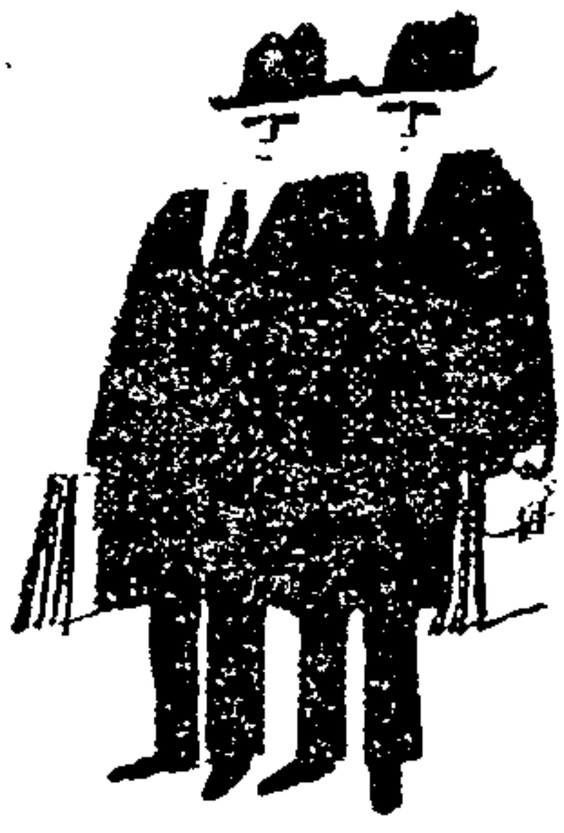
"Not after you handled them. Then why the pencil that was sent to me? Big dangerous threat. It reinforced the rest. But like I told your choir boy from Vegas, they don't send them when they mean them. By the way, he had a gun too. A Woodsman .22 with a silencer. I had to make him put it away. He was nice about that. He started waving grands at me to find out where you were and tell him. A well-dressed, nice looking front man for a pack of dirty rats. The Women's Christian Temperance Association and some bootlicking politicians gave them the money to be big, and they learned how to use it and make it grow. Now they're pretty well unstoppable. But they're still a pack of dirty rats. And they're always where they can't make a mistake. That's inhuman. Any man has a right to a few mistakes. Not the rats. They have to be perfect all the time. Or else they get stuck with *you*."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about. I just know it's too long."

"Well, allow me to put it in English. Some poor jerk from the East Side gets involved with the lower echelons of a mob. You know what an echelon is, Ikky?"

"I been in the Army," he sneered.

"He grows up in the mob, but he's not all rotten. He's not rotten enough. So he tries to break loose. He comes out here and gets himself a cheap job of some sort and changes his name or names and lives quietly in a cheap apartment house. But the mob by now has agents in many places. Somebody spots him and recognises him. It might be a pusher, a front man for a bookie joint, a night girl, even a cop that's on the take. So the mob, or call them the Outfit, say through their cigar smoke: 'Ikky can't do this to us. It's a small operation because he's small. But it annoys us. Bad for discipline. Call a couple of boys and have them pencil him.' But what boys do they call? A couple they're tired of. Been around too long. Might make a mistake or get chilly toes. Perhaps they like killing.



That's bad. That makes recklessness. The best boys are the ones that don't care either way. So although they don't know it, the boys they call are on their way out. But it would be kind of cute to frame a guy they already don't like, for fingering a hood named Larsen. One of these puny little jokes the Outfit takes big. 'Look guys, we even got time to play footies with a private eye.' So they send a ringer."

"The Torri brothers ain't ringers. They're real hard boys. They proved it—even if they did make a mistake."

"Mistake nothing. They got Ikky Rosenstein. You're just a singing commercial in this deal. And as of now you're under arrest for murder. You're worse off than that. The Outfit will habeas corpus you out of the clink and blow you down. You've served your purpose and you failed to finger me into a patsy."

His finger tightened on the trigger. I shot the gun out of his hand. My gun in my coat pocket was small, but at that distance accurate. And it was one of my days to be accurate.

He made a faint moaning sound and sucked at his hand. I went over and kicked him hard in the chest. Being nice to killers is not part of my repertoire. He went over backwards and sideways and stumbled four or five steps. I picked up his gun and held it on him while I tapped all the places—where a man could stash a second gun. He was clean.

"What are you trying to do to me?" he said whiningly. "I paid you. You're clear. I paid you damn well."

"We both have problems there. Yours is to stay alive." I took a pair of cuffs out of my pocket and wrestled his hands behind him and snapped them on. His hand was bleeding. I went to the telephone.

Flagstaff was big enough to have a police force. The DA might even have his office there. This was Arizona, a poor state, relatively. The cops might even be honest.

I had to stick around for a few days, but I didn't mind that as long as I could have trout caught eight or nine thousand feet up. I called Anne and Bernie Ohls. I called my answering service. The Arizona DA was a young keen-eyed man and the Chief of Police was one of the biggest men I ever saw.

I got back to LA in time and took Anne to Romanoff's for dinner and champagne.

"What I can't see," she said over a third glass of bubbly, "is why they dragged you into it, why they set up the fake Ikky Rosenstein. Why didn't they just let the two lifetakers do their job?"

"I couldn't really say. Unless the big boys feel so safe they're developing a sense of humour. And unless this Larsen guy that went to the gas chamber was bigger than he seemed to be. Only three or four important mobsters have made the electric chair or the rope or the gas chamber. None that I know of in the life-imprisonment states like Michigan. If Larsen was bigger than anyone thought, they might have had my name on a waiting list."

"But why wait?" she asked me.

"They can afford to wait. Who's going to bother them—Capone may have had several hundred men killed, and killed a few of them himself, personally. But it took the Internal Revenue boys to get him. The Outfit won't make that mistake often."

"What I like about you, apart from your enormous personal charm, is that when you don't know an answer you make one up."

"The money worries me," I said. "Five grand of their dirty money. What do I do with it?"

"Don't be a jerk all your life. You earned the money and you risked your life for it. You can buy Government Bonds. They'll make the money clean. And to me that would be part of the joke."

"*You* tell *me* one good reason why they pulled the switch."

"You have more of a reputation than you realise. And how would it be if the false Ikky pulled the switch? He sounds like one of these types that can't do anything simple."

"The Outfit will get him for making his own plans—if you're right."

"If the DA doesn't. And I couldn't care less about what happens to him. More champagne, please."

They extradited "Ikky" and he broke under pressure and named the two gunmen—after I had already named them, the Torri brothers. But nobody could find them. They never went home. And you can't prove conspiracy on one man. The law couldn't even get him for accessory after the fact. They couldn't prove he knew the real Ikky had been gunned.

They could have got him for some trifle, but they had a better idea. They left him to his friends. They turned him loose.

Where is he now? My hunch says nowhere.

Anne Riordan was glad it was all over and I was safe. Safe—that isn't a word you use in my trade.

© Helga Greene 1965

cool drinking

THE man who said that he would make almost any financial sacrifice to send his children to a private school and keep a decent bottle of wine on his table was voicing the unspoken feelings of many other people.

Regardless of import charges or budget impost, it is important that the wine-lover should take a long hard look at his spending plans. He need not be unduly downcast, for it is still possible to buy plenty of sound wines for day to day drinking at moderate prices; or moderate in relation to the pleasure and contentment they produce.

These are not vintage wines for special occasions—but for ordinary enjoyment.

Let us start with a comparatively new arrival—the red and white Monte Cristo wines from Cyprus, shipped by Imported Wines Ltd., who are agents for those most experienced growers, P. B. Burgoyne. The dry white, and the red which is on the dry light side, cost only 8s. 3d. a bottle. The sweet white, which goes well with the sweet or dessert, is no more expensive.

The Carafino wines—red, white and rosé, are sold in the fashion of French vins ordinaires, in litre bottles at 10s. 4d. a litre, or in half-gallon pitchers at 21s., which is really about 1s. per glass. These are "factory" wines from the well-known Bordeaux firm of Lemaire and are sold in Fosters and Peter Dominic wine shops.

With natural pride, Grants of St. James's, who distribute the Nicolas range of vins ordinaires have announced a price reduction. For the red Canteval and Vieux Ceps, the price for the litre bottle is now 10s. 3d. and 10s. 9d. respectively.

Etablissements Nicolas at Charenton, outside Paris, have

one of the world's most famous posters—the man in the "Blouson Bleu" clutching two handfuls of bottles, and it sells in France some half a million litres of wine per day. In Britain, the retail outlets for Nicolas' vins ordinaires—and that is all they claim to be—are Victoria Wine, Tyler's, My Cellar, Bristol Vintners, Bailey's and Innes Smith.

For those who are partial to dry white wines, the Hungarian Riesling is good value for money. It comes from the Villanyi-Pecs district and is known as Janos Riesling. Fosters and Street sell it at 13s. 6d. a bottle.

From across the frontier, in Austria, comé the admirable red and white Morandell estate-bottled wines. The 1959 Kalterersee Auslese is a red wine of notable quality and unusual interest. It is as pleasant chilled in summer as it is chambré in winter. And the Soho Wine Market in Greek Street sell it at 13s. 6d. a bottle

Most wine shops keep the white Austrian Schluck Sylvaner, which is far from expensive at 10s. 3d. a bottle. Another estate-bottled wine about which the same thing can be said is the medium dry Stein from South Africa at 10s. 3d.

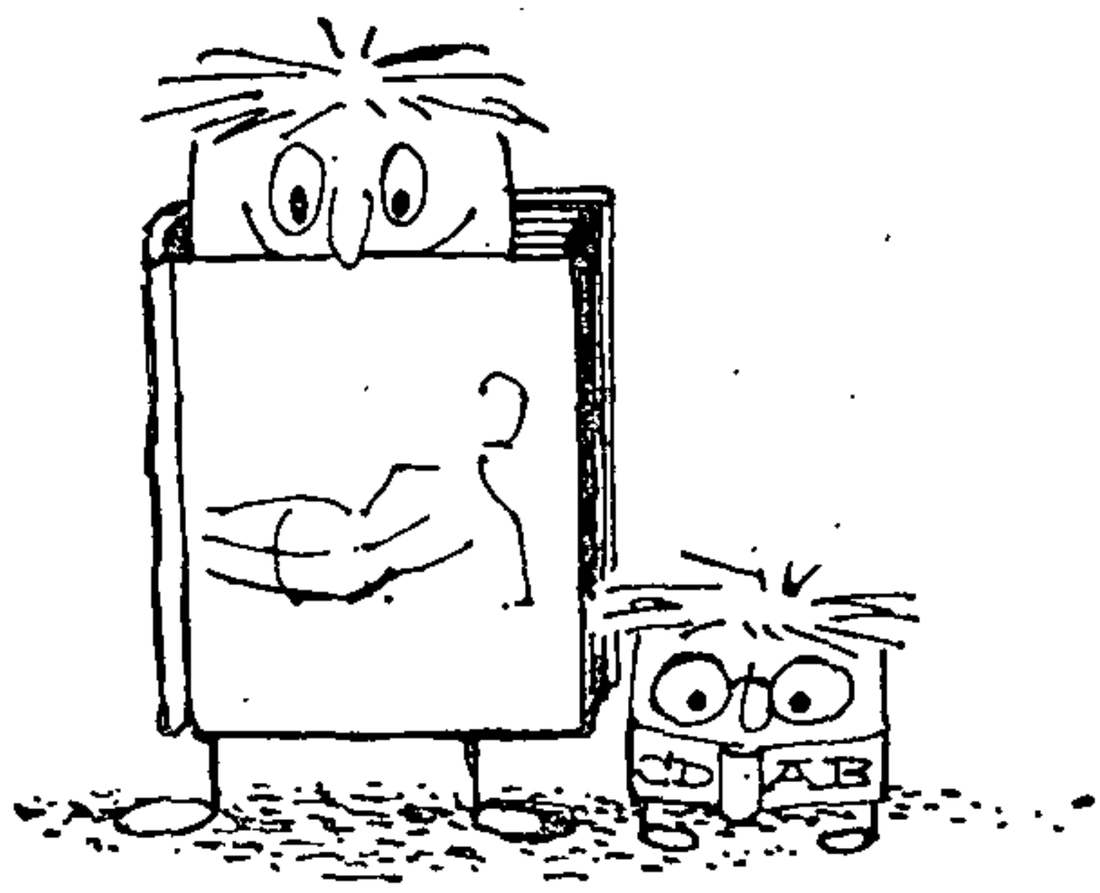
In recent years both Spain and Portugal have built up an established reputation in Britain not only as the source of sherry and port, but also of inexpensive white and red table wines, ranging in price from a little over 7s. a bottle to about 8s. 6d. From Spain, the Valdepenas red and Rioja white are always reliable as are the Portuguese dry white Dão Branco and the quite unusual very dry red Vila Real Tinto. James Hawker and Co. of Plymouth ship what they claim is Spain's finest wine, the red Marques de Riscal Elciego Alvava, which sells at 14s. Hawkins also ship a sound red Chilean wine—namely Vina San Pedro Reservado which is 10s. a bottle. This has the style of a claret, but there are fuller red Chilean Burgundies at 8s. 6d. Santa Rita is a sound one.

In France it has been for a long time the practice to drink Beaujolais "vin de l'année," the wine of the current vintage, fresh from the cask. In contrast, it has been the British practice to keep this wine too long. Harveys of Bristol are shipping a 1964 Beaujolais selling at 10s. per bottle.

This list of budget wines is by no means exhaustive, for Yugoslavia, South Africa and Australia are also among the countries offering sound wines at very reasonable prices, but it does show that it is still possible to enjoy a sound glass of wine without first seeking the permission of the bank manager.

J.B.W.

bookshelf



WITH much pleasure we introduce Professor William Foley, cheerful, middle-aged, endearing. To his astonishment he has inherited a castle in *May You Die in Ireland* by Michael Kenyon and we meet him on his way there. A stolen microfilm of vital secret information has been hidden in his travel folder and agents of three governments are in hot pursuit.

Attacked from all sides and helped by a pretty nurse, our professor uses his wits and driving skill to escape from his alarming and mysterious assailants.

It's all very exciting and we look forward immensely to meeting Dr. Foley again. (Collins Crime Club, 16s.)

Ed McBain has deserted the 87th Precinct and its crime sheets for the more frightening affair of one Jason Trench, a wholly dedicated man with a desperate plan, ready to gamble with the future of the world.

The Sentries is by far the most ambitious work attempted by this author, cleverly plotted and strangely, uncomfortably believable. (Hamish Hamilton, 21s.)

Another fresh name among this month's issue of paperbacks is H. H. Kirst, author of two savage, haunting war books—*The Night of the Generals* and *Officer Factory*. Also represented is that most reliable of storytellers, Hammond Innes, with *The White South* and *The Trojan Horse*. (Fontana; Kirst 5s. and Innes 2s. 6d. each.)

Following the successful "Masterpieces" omnibus, comes another collection, *With Woman In Mind*. These three romantic novels are all excellent in their own field, and by highly experienced writers, Charity Blackstock, Elizabeth Cadell and Dorothy Eden. For the distaff side of the family. (Hodder, 7s. 6d.)

East meets West with the most outrageous results in Lesley Blanch's *The Nine Tiger Man.* Most of it happens in the India of the 1850s but begins when Rao Jagnabad, fierce Hindu prince, comes to England. A superb preposterous bit of fun. (Collins, 18s.)

There is a new collection of short stories, *The Desperadoes,* from the miner-turned-writer, Stan Barstow. (Penguin, 5s.)

Rachel Carson's terrifying warning, *Silent Spring*, has been paperbacked too. Strongly recommended by Prince Philip at a recent World Wild Life Fund meeting, it clearly and dispassionately documents the appalling rate at which we are poisoning birds and endangering our own existence through uncontrolled use of insecticides. (Penguin, 5s.)

Jean Bruce, whose books sell a steady million and a half yearly in France, was already a millionaire when he crashed and died in a 100 m.p.h. accident.

Now in striking black and white jackets, paperback editions of the espionage thrillers which brought him wealth and fame are appearing over here and his hero, Agent OSS117 or Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath may become almost as well known as our native James Bond. Try *Deep Freeze* or *Soft Sell.* (Corgi, 3s. 6d. each.)

Another successful anthology has been edited by John Welcome—*Best Secret Service Stories, 2.* He is perhaps stretching editorial licence a bit far, as the story by William Haggard is an extract from an earlier full-length novel, "The Arena," and isn't entirely happy out of context. The same can be said of Alan Williams' "Barbouse," which is even less satisfactory, leaving the exasperated reader who hasn't read the full version very much in mid-air!

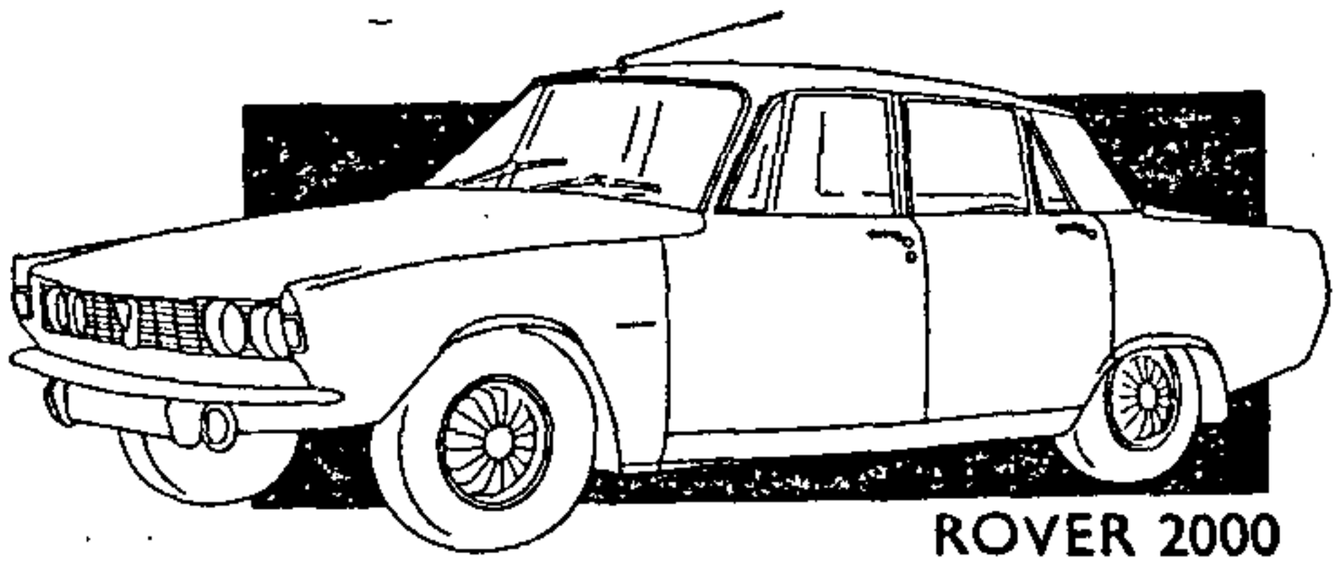
In his interesting introduction the editor concerns himself with James Bond and his creator Ian Fleming.

Ian Fleming, says John Welcome, invented the brand-image of the present day secret service man, self-confident, amoral, violent and ruthless. Yet perceptively, the Bond story he has chosen for his collection is, "Quantum of Solace," in which agent 007 takes a secondary role—that of a docile listener. And I agree with John Welcome's finding: this is far and away the best short story of all that Ian Fleming wrote.

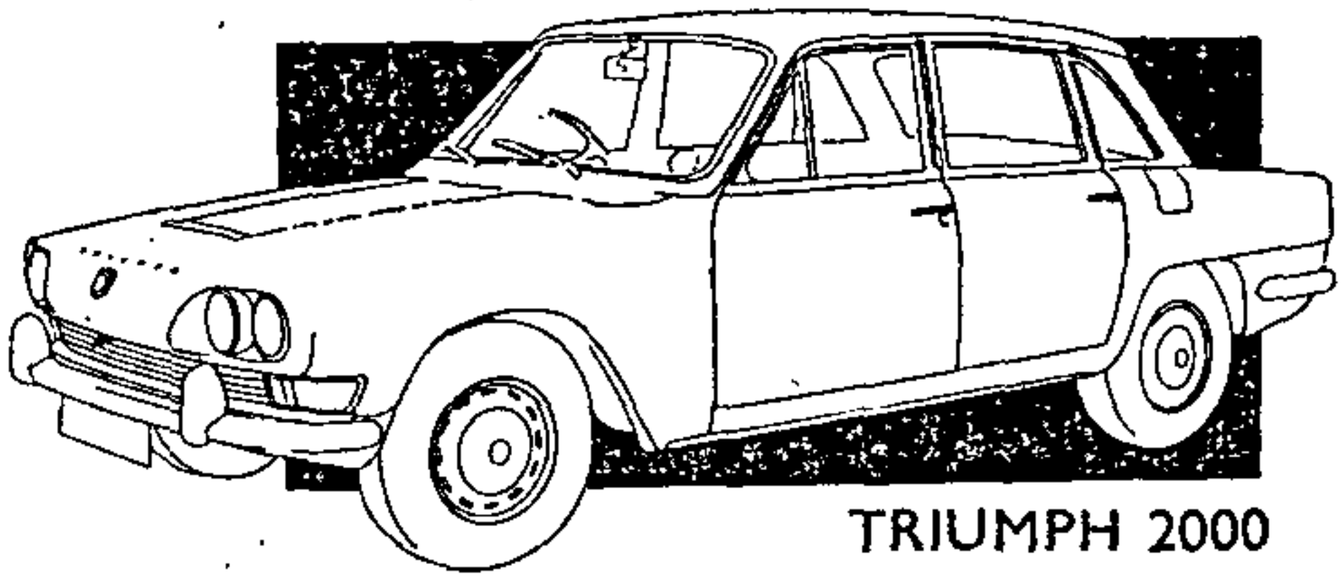
Among other authors there is a vintage Maugham, and one of Michael Gilbert's best—featuring Mr. Calder. (Faber, 18s.)

J.D.

man about cars



ROVER 2000



TRIUMPH 2000

HAVING been announced at nearly the same time and with almost identical tags, the Rover 2000 and the Triumph 2000 just ask to be compared.

The similarity goes farther than the name and almost the same engine size. Both body styles have an indefinable air of similarity even to the twin headlamps. So it is with a good deal of interest this month that I set out to find how much alike these cars really are.

I took the obvious properties first. In size they are almost the same, the Rover being only 4 inches longer. Width and height differences are in fractions. The appearance is similar, the boot shape, too. So the first real difference comes with the internal styling and seating.

The Triumph offers itself as a four or five seater; the Rover as a definite four with individual seats at the back. Material in seating differs, too. The Triumph has a very high grade PVC (the very soft pliable sort) and the Rover has the traditional leather. But this is the sort of difference one can expect with the Rover costing something like £170 more.

The interior styling is where difference in price strikes you. The Triumph is tasteful and obviously of good quality but it follows the car designer's approach to interiors. The Rover, however, has much more of an architect's approach in the restrained use of materials, so that internally the Rover is rather less likely to look dated.

In the engine compartment, both have engines of nearly 2000 c.c.—the Rover a four cylinder with a compression ratio of 9.0: 1; the Triumph a six cylinder with compression ratio of 8.5: 1. Both cars return a net b.h.p. of 90 at 5000 r.p.m.

On the open road both cars are a delight to drive, being comfortable and exceptionally quiet. The Rover takes the lead in terms of top speed, just on 105 m.p.h. with the Triumph a close second at around 97 m.p.h.

The Triumph scores in terms of "getaway" doing 0-50 m.p.h. in 9.4 seconds while the Rover takes just over 10 seconds.

On a long hard run, much of it through the night, the Triumph 2000 proved a pleasant and restful car to drive. Handling was excellent—an impression of sponginess quickly giving way to one of respect for the way the car cornered at very high speed. Two factors which did much to contribute to the pleasure of the run were the optional overdrive (high speed in normal top produced a fuzzy note from the otherwise silky-smooth engine) and the fact that the Triumph has fitted, as standard, fully reclining seats, so that with two drivers aboard, one can rest while the other drives. The twin headlight system proved well up to the performance and was properly adjusted. Brakes were good.

Controls and instruments were conveniently to hand and easy to see. Rocking piano switches operate lights and windscreen wipers and washers. Warning lights include one for low fuel level and one for choke. An irritating fault which showed up on the night run was the reflection in the windscreen of the chromium stalk controlling the indicator and headlight flasher.

The heater proved adequate, though not exceptional, with controls that were easy to use. Two good points were the two-speed fan and the duct taking warm air to the feet of the passengers in the rear.

The whole of the interior was well finished and fitted—the floor and boot being fully carpeted. There are arm-rests on all the doors and one in the centre of the rear seat. Odds and ends are quite well catered for—a lockable glove box at the left of the facia and quite a large recessed well around the gear lever. Child-proof locks are fitted on all doors and in the test car seat belts were fitted for both front and rear.

There was no opportunity for a long overnight run with the Rover 2000 but a good deal of hard driving was packed into the time available.

Like the Triumph, the Rover gave an immediate feeling of quality and refinement. Handling was superb and it proved quite difficult to get the back to break away either on wet or

dry roads. In fact one felt that with its sports car handling, the Rover could well take a beefier engine. The leather seats were well shaped with plenty of fore and aft adjustment and were fully reclining.

Controls are neatly laid out with a strip speedometer which has a fair assortment of warning lights, including one for the handbrake around it. Included in this rectangular console are fuel and temperature gauges. In the centre of the facia there is a small clock and a vent for directing air at face level.

The strip speedometer took a little getting used to—but is always clearly visible behind the two-spoke steering wheel. A great boon to nervous fuel gauge watchers, is a small knob marked petrol reserve.

Oddments include padded lockable bins at knee height, and a large flat area across the facia. Altogether the interior on the test car (in black leather and natural wood) had a dignified air of quality with a fully carpeted floor, arm-rests on all doors and one between the rear seats.

The handbrake and starting test on a 1 in 4 hill proved most interesting. The handbrake held the car well but the re-start was marred because it jammed. Once the brake was released the Rover started with ease. Inspection showed that the handbrake merely needed adjustment.

Lights were good but also needed adjustment. The bonnet proved heavy to lift and is supported by a single metal stay.

Summing up is difficult. With each car I was reluctant to hand it back and both had a great many likeable qualities. The Rover handled better and had higher top speed but the Triumph had slightly better acceleration and a longer range on a full tank of petrol by about 50 miles. Both cars covered between 23 and 30 miles to a gallon.

Both cars were unusual in having mounting points for safety harness for both front and rear seats.

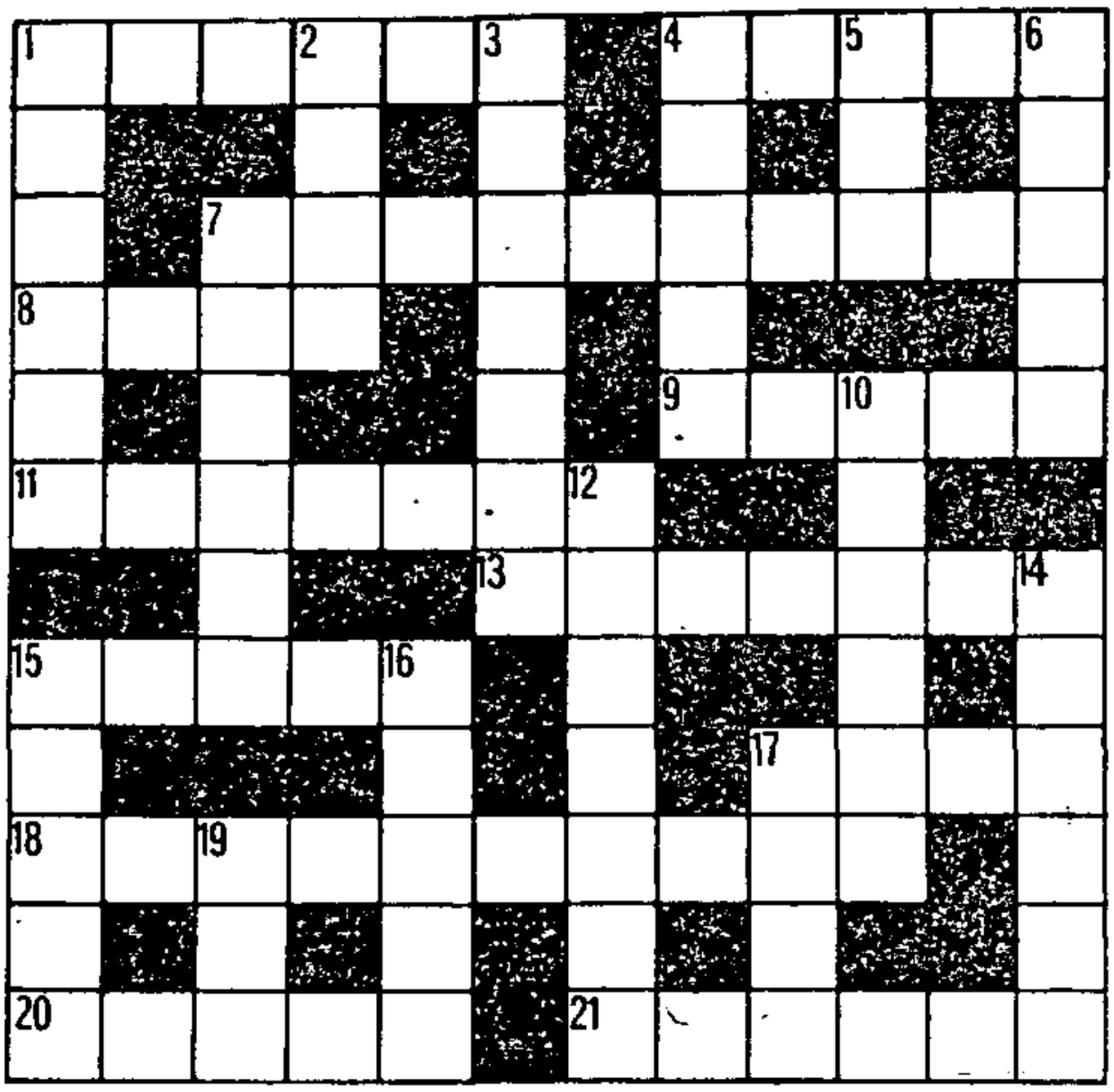
The basic difference apart from price between the cars, is that the Triumph is a family car with a sporty touch while the Rover is much more of a genuine sports saloon.

ROVER 2000	
Price including P.T.	£1,298
Engine : 4 cylinder	1,978 c.c.
Compression ratio	9.0 : 1
Overall length	14ft. 10¼in.
Width	5ft. 6½in.
Height	4ft. 7¼in.

TRIUMPH 2000	
Price including P.T.	£1,119
overdrive	£54
Engine : 6 cylinder	1,998 c.c.
Compression ratio	8.5 : 1
Overall length	14ft. 6½in.
Width	5ft. 5¾in.
Height	4ft. 7¾in.

K.F.

TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Facetiously French! (6).

4 He works in stone (5).

7 Blessings of the Bible (10).

8 Early bird? (4).

9 Get back into the game (5).

11 Colourful but patchy (7).

13 Greek lover (7).

15 It's full of holes (5).

17 Cosy (4).

18 Fishy diversion! (3, 7).

20 Tipsy (5).

21 Useful part of any machine! (6).

DOWN

1 Jockey's run-in? (6).

2 It's symbolic to Taffy (4).

3 Derisive miaow? (7).

4 Pater's partner (5).

5 Divot (3).

6 Unpalatable (5).

7 Quarrel—just wind! (6).

10 Bill for cargo (6).

12 Severed (anag.) (7).

14 Dine and wine? (6).

15 Small spar (5).

16 It just happened! (5).

17 Unforeseen difficulty (4).

19 Track an animal (3).

(Solution below)

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (AUGUST ISSUE)

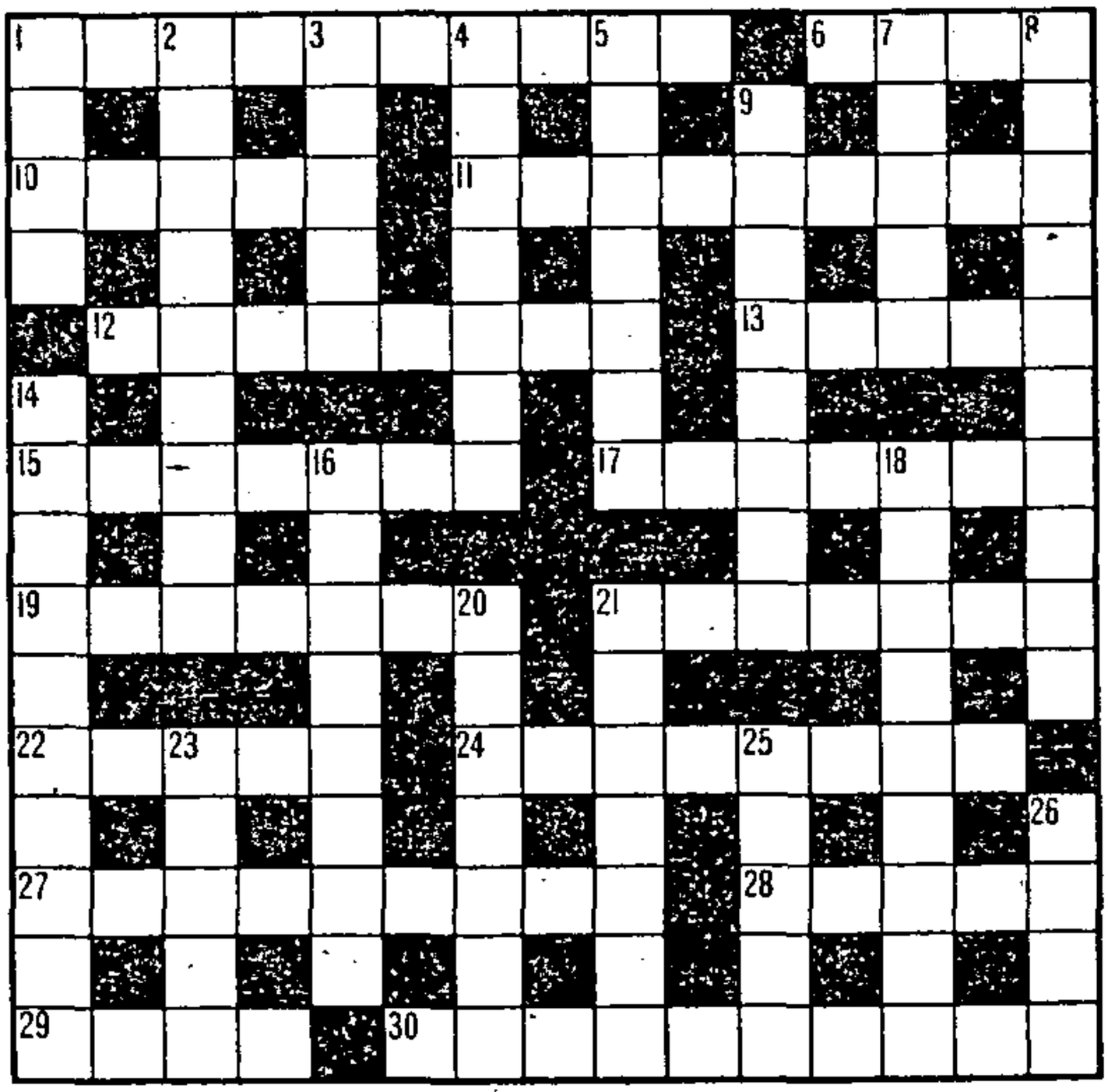
Across. 1, *Robot.* 4, *March past.* 9, *Renewed.* 10, *Shebeen.* 11, *Tang.* 12, *Libra.* 13, *Stay.* 16, *Niagara.* 17, *Mustang.* 19, *Aintree.* 22, *Migrate.* 24, *Bomb.* 25, *Spare.* 26, *Stet.* 29, *Bee-line.* 30, *Modiste.* 31, *Posthaste.* 32, *Swell.*
Down. 1, *Ruritania.* 2, *Bonanza.* 3, *Town.* 4, *Madeira.* 5, *Rostrum.* 6, *Heel.* 7, *Amentia.* 8, *Tansy.* 14, *Fairy.* 15, *Usage.* 18, *Great Seal.* 20, *Numbers.* 21, *Express.* 22, *Mérimée.* 23, *Artiste.* 24, *Bebop.* 27, *Pith.* 28, *Odes.*

SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS. 1, Gallic. 4, Mason. 7, Beatitudes. 8, Lark. 9, Rally. 11, Piebald. 13, Leander. 15, Sieve. 17, Snug. 18, Red herring. 20, Tight. 21, Engine.
DOWN. 1, Gallop. 2, Leek. 3, Catcall. 4, Mater. 5, Sod. 6, Nasty. 7, Breeze. 10, Lading. 12, Deserve. 14, Regale. 15, Sprit. 16, Event. 17, Snag. 19, Dog.

ARGÓSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 There's loyalty, for example, in a marriage (10).

6 Let it stand! (4).

10 It's time for music (5).

11 An evolving theory (9).

12 Missile at home making news (8).

13 Flower meaning a great deal to us! (5).

15 This Jack's made tame by a day out! (7).

17 Music room? (7).

19 They function either side of a small bridge! (7).

21 Pledge in person (7).

22 He holds a dogma (5).

24 Egyptian high-up, also a slave (8).

27 Once tried to be obscure (9).

28 "——, lute and harp" (Psalms) (5).

29 Runs for a passing ball! (4).

30 Novel—not liked (10).

DOWN

1 Three to a play, usually (4).

2 In US oil me—got a lovely car! (9).

3 "Miss Blimber dug them up like a ——" (Dickens) (5).

4 He listens—only to certain books? (7).

5 Lingering—is bad? (7).

7 Kinky dance! (5).

8 Convict? He has no convictions! (4–6).

9 Deceives girl without guidance! (8).

14 Mudlark in Medina (6, 4).

16 Through this those types are going to make a good impression (8).

18 Wicked letters demand tribute! (9).

20 Old Italian tribe means it this time (7).

21 Sick man emphatically not! (7).

23 Hollow or chine (5).

25 Read up on renal disorder (5).

26 Metal — spacious not precious! (4).

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